The Canterbury Tales

Geoffrey Chaucer

A Complete Modernisation by

A. S. Kline

POETRY IN TRANSLATION
www.poetryintranslation.com

© Copyright 2007 A. S. Kline

Cover design by Poetry in Translation

Digital scans/photographs of the images in the main text have been released into the public domain by The British Library (www.flickr.com/photos/britishlibrary/). All related image rights are at the discretion of the copyright holders of the original images and/or the referenced institution.

Textual content of this work may be freely reproduced, stored and transmitted, electronically or otherwise, for any non-commercial purpose. Restrictions apply to adaptation of the work. Usage of any material for commercial purposes resulting in direct, indirect or incidental commercial gain requires permission to be sought and granted in writing from the copyright holder.
Refer to the Poetry in Translation copyright statement
(*www.poetryintranslation.com/Admin/Copyright.htm*)

Any statements or opinions expressed in this book reflect the views of the author alone. Although the author has made every effort to ensure that the information in this book was correct at the time of going to press, the author does not assume and hereby disclaims any liability to any party for any loss, damage, or disruption caused by errors or omissions, whether such errors or omissions result from negligence, accident, or any other cause.

Please direct sales or editorial enquiries to:
tonykline@poetryintranslation.com

This print edition is published by
Poetry In Translation (*www.poetryintranslation.com*),

ISBN-10: 1539651150
ISBN-13: 978-1539651154

CONTENTS

The General Prologue 5
The Knight's Tale 31
The Miller's Prologue 97
The Miller's Tale 100
The Reeve's Prologue 119
The Reeve's Tale 121
The Cook's Prologue 133
The Cook's Tale 135
The Man of Law's Prologue 137
The Man of Law's Tale 142
The Epilogue to the Man of Law's Tale 181
The Wife of Bath's Prologue 182
The Wife of Bath's Tale 206
The Friar's Prologue 218
The Friar's Tale 220
The Summoner's Prologue 231
The Summoner's Tale 233
The Clerk's Prologue 250
The Clerk's Tale 252
The Merchant's Prologue 299
The Merchant's Tale 301
The Merchant's Epilogue 334
The Squire's Prologue 335
The Squire's Tale 336
The Squire-Franklin Link 356
The Franklin's Prologue 358
The Franklin's Tale 359
The Physician's Tale 386
The Physician-Pardoner Link 395
The Pardoner's Prologue 397
The Pardoner's Tale 402

The Shipman's Tale 417
The Shipman-Prioress Link 430
The Prioress's Prologue 431
The Prioress's Tale 433
The Prioress- Sir Topaz Link 441
Sir Topaz 442
The Topaz-Melibee Link 452
The Tale of Melibee 454
The Monk's Prologue 460
The Monk's Tale 463
The Nun's Priest's Prologue 489
The Nun's Priest's Tale 491
The Epilogue to the Nun's Priest's Tale 509
The Second Nun's Prologue 510
The Second Nun's Tale 515
The Manciple's Prologue 531
The Manciple's Tale 535
The Parson's Prologue 543
The Parson's Tale 546
Chaucer's Retraction 549

THE GENERAL PROLOGUE

hen that April with his showers sweet
The drought of March has pierced root deep,
And bathed each vein with liquor of such power
That engendered from it is the flower,
When Zephyrus too with his gentle strife,
To every field and wood, has brought new life
In tender shoots, and the youthful sun
Half his course through the Ram has run,
And little birds are making melody,
Who all the night with open eye do sleep –
Nature their hearts in every way so pricks –
Then people long to go on pilgrimage,
And palmers who seek out foreign strands,
To far-off shrines, renowned in sundry lands;
And specially, from every shire's end
Of England, down to Canterbury they wend,
The holy blissful martyr there to seek,
Who had aided them when they were sick.
It befell that in that season on a day,
In Southwark at *The Tabard* as I lay,
Ready to set out on my pilgrimage
To Canterbury with pious courage,
There came at night to that hostelry
Quite nine and twenty in a company
Of sundry folk who had chanced to fall
Into a fellowship, and pilgrims all,
That towards Canterbury meant to ride.
The chambers and the stables were full wide,
And we housed at our ease, and of the best;
And shortly, when the sun had gone to rest,
I had such speech with each and everyone,

Dinner in the Olden Times

That of their fellowship I soon made one,
Agreeing I would make an early rise,
To take our way there, as I now advise.
  Nonetheless while I have time and space,
Before a step more of my tale I pace,
It seems to me in full accord with reason,
To tell you everything of their condition,
Of each of them, as they appeared to me,
And who they were, and of what degree,
And what apparel they were travelling in;
And with a knight then I will first begin.
  There was a KNIGHT and he a worthy man,
That from the day on which he first began,
To ride abroad, had followed chivalry,
Truth, honour, courtesy and charity.
He had fought nobly in his lord's war,
And ridden to the fray, and no man more,
As much in Christendom as heathen place,
And ever honoured for his worth and grace.
When we took Alexandria was there;
Often at table held the place of honour,
Above all other nations too in Prussia;
Campaigned in Lithuania and Russia,
No Christian man of his rank more often.
At the siege of Algeciras had he been,
In Granada, and on Moroccan shore;
He was at Ayash and Antalya
When taken, and many times had been
In action on the Mediterranean Sea.
Of mortal battles he had seen fifteen,
And fought for the faith at Tramissene
Thrice in the lists and always slain his foe.
This same worthy knight had been also
With the Emir of Balat once, at work
With him against some other heathen Turk;
Won him a reputation highly prized,
And though he was valiant, he was wise,

And in his manner modest as a maid.
And never a discourtesy he said
In all his life to those who met his sight;
He was a very perfect gentle knight.
But to tell of his equipment, his array,
His horses fine, he wore no colours gay
Sported a tunic, padded fustian
On which his coat of mail left many a stain;
For he was scarcely back from his voyage,
And going now to make his pilgrimage.
With him there was his son, a young SQUIRE,
Lover and lively bachelor entire
With locks as crisp as from a curling-press;
Of twenty years of age he was, I guess.
Of his stature, he was of middle height,
Wonderfully agile, powerful in a fight.
And had served a while in the cavalry,
In Flanders, in Artois and Picardy,
And done so well, and in so short a space,
He hoped for favour from his lady's grace.
Like to a meadow he was embroidered,
One full of fresh flowers white and red.
Singing he was, or playing flute all day;
He was as fresh as is the month of May.
Short was his gown, with sleeves both long and wide;
He knew how to sit a horse, and could ride.
He could make songs, and compose aright,
Joust and dance, and draw things well and write.
He loved so hotly night through without fail
He slept no more than does the nightingale.
Courteous he was, humble, attentive, able,
And carved for his father at the table.
A YEOMAN had he (servants did forgo
Other than this, and chose to travel so),
One who was clad in coat and hood of green.
A sheaf of peacock arrows, bright and keen
Sheathed in his belt he bore right properly –

Well could he dress his gear, yeomanly;
His arrows never drooped with feathers low –
And in his hand he bore a mighty bow.
Cropped hair he had, and a nut-brown visage;
Of woodcraft he well knew all the usage.
On his arm an archer's brace he wore,
And by his side a buckler and a sword,
And at the other side a jaunty dagger
Ornamented, and sharp as any spear;
On his breast St Christopher did gleam.
He bore a horn, the baldric was of green.
He truly was a forester, I guess.
  There was also a nun, a PRIORESS,
Her smile itself ingenuous and coy.
Her greatest oath was only 'by Saint Loy',
And she was called Madame Eglentine.
Full well she sung the service, divine,
Intoning through her nose, all seemly,
And fair French she spoke, all elegantly,
After the school of Stratford-atte-Bowe;
For French of Paris was not hers to know.
At meals she had been taught well withal;
And from her lips she let no morsel fall,
Nor dipped her fingers in the sauce too deep;
Well could she take a morsel and then keep
The slightest drop from falling on her breast;
Courtesy it was that pleased her best.
Her upper lip she would wipe so clean
That in her cup no trace of grease was seen
When she had drunk her draught; and to eat,
In a most seemly manner took her meat.
And certainly she had a cheerful manner,
Pleasant and amiable in her behaviour,
Took pains to imitate the ways of court,
Display a stately bearing as she ought,
And be considered worthy of reverence.
As for consideration of her conscience,

She was so charitable, tender, anxious,
She would weep if she but saw a mouse
Caught in a trap, if it were dead or bled.
Of slender hounds she had, that she fed
With roasted flesh, or milk, and fine white bread;
But wept sorely when one of them was dead
Or if men struck it with a stick too hard,
And all was sentiment and tender heart.
Her wimple was pleated in a seemly way,
Her nose was elegant, her eyes blue-grey;
Her lips quite fine, and also soft and red,
But certainly she had a fair forehead,
It was almost a span broad, I deem,
For she was not small of build, I mean.
Her cloak was very elegant, I saw;
Fine coral round her arm she wore
A rosary, the larger beads were green,
And from it hung a brooch of golden sheen,
On which there first was writ a crowned A,
And after: 'Amor vincit omnia'.
  Another NUN she had with her, and she
Was her chaplain, and with them priests three.
A MONK there was, of the highest degree,
Who loved to hunt, agent of a monastery,
A manly man, for an Abbot's role quite able.
Full many a fine horse had he in his stable,
His bridle, when he rode, men might hear
Jingling in a whistling wind as clear,
And quite as loud as does the chapel bell.
Now as this lord was prior of his cell,
The rule of Saint Benedict and Saint Mawr,
As old and somewhat strict he would ignore,
This same monk scorned the old world's pace,
And spurred after the new world, apace.
He gave not for that text a plucked hen
That says that hunters are not holy men,
And that a monk when he grows heedless

Is like a fish that's all waterless –
That is to say a monk out of his cloister –
But he held that text not worth an oyster.
And I agreed his views were scarcely bad:
What! Should he study, drive himself quite mad,
In his cloister over a book must pore,
Or labour with his hands, and toil the more
As Augustine bids? How would the world run?
Let Augustine keep his labour for his own!
  Therefore he was a hunting man outright.
Greyhounds he had, as swift as birds in flight;
Tracking with dogs and hunting the hare
Was all his pleasure, no cost did he spare.
I saw his sleeves were trimmed at the wrist
With grey fur, and of the country's finest;
And to fasten his hood beneath his chin,
He had a wrought-gold elaborate pin;
A love-knot in the larger end there was.
His head was bald, and shone like any glass,
And his face, as if he had been anointed;
He was a lord full fat, and well appointed.
His bulging eyeballs, rolling in his head,
Glowing like a cauldron-fire well-fed;
Supple his boots, his horse in perfect state.
Now certainly he was a fair prelate;
He was not pale like some tormented ghost.
A fat swan he loved best of any roast;
His palfrey was as brown as is a berry.
  A FRIAR there was, a wanton one and merry,
A Limiter, a very jovial man.
In all the friars' four orders none that can
Lead a discussion in fairer language.
And he had arranged many a marriage
Of young women, granting each a dower.
He was a noble pillar of his Order.
Well-beloved and intimate was he
With Franklins within his boundary,

And also worthy women of the town;
Had power to confess coat and gown –
As he said himself – more than a curate,
Having licence from his bishop to do it.
Full sweetly he would hear confessions,
And very pleasant were his absolutions.
He was an easy man at granting penance
From which he made more than a pittance.
When to a poor Order alms are given
It is a token that a man's well-shriven;
Since he dared claim that from the intent,
Of giving, then the man was penitent.
For many a man is so hard of heart
He cannot weep, though he feels the smart.
Therefore instead of weeping and prayer,
Better to give the poor friars silverware.
His sleeve's end was stuffed with pocket-knives
And gilded pins, to give to pretty wives.
He could hold a note for sure; could sing
And play quite sweetly on the tuneful string.
Such competitions he won easily.
His neck was white as the fleur-de-lis;
And he was as strong as any champion.
He knew the taverns well in every town,
And all the barmaids and innkeepers,
Rather than the lepers and the beggars
Since such a worthy man as he
It suited not his calling or degree,
With such lepers to maintain acquaintance.
It is not seemly – helps no man advance –
To have dealings with such poor people,
Only with the rich, sellers of victuals.
An everywhere a profit might arise,
He wore a courteous and humble guise;
There was no man half so virtuous.
He was the finest beggar of his house
– and paid a fixed fee for the right;

None of his brethren poached in his sight.
For though a widow lacked a shoe
So pleasant was his '*In principio*',
He yet would gain a farthing as he went.
His income was far greater than his rent,
And he romped around, like any whelp.
In settling disputes he could help,
Not like a friar from a cloister,
With threadbare cloak, like needy scholar,
But he was like a doctor or a pope;
Of double worsted was his demi-cloak,
A bell shaped from the mould, its fashion.
He lisped a little out of affectation,
To sound his English sweet upon the tongue;
And in his harping, whenever he had sung,
His eyes would twinkle in his head aright
As do the stars on high in frosty night.
Hubert his name, this worthy Limiter.
A MERCHANT was there, with a forked beard,
Dressed in motley, high on horse he sat.
Upon his head a Flemish beaver hat,
Buckled his boots were, fair and neatly.
He made his comments solemnly, fully,
Boasting of profits ever increasing,
Wishing sea-trade secure, more than anything,
Twixt Middleburgh and the River Orwell.
He could exchange monies, buy and sell.
This worthy man made such use of his wits;
No one knew he was beset by debts,
So stately his manner of behaving,
In his bargaining, and money-lending.
Truly a worthy man then, all in all,
But truth to tell, I know not what he's called.
A CLERK there was of Oxford town also,
Who had set himself to logic long ago.
Thinner was his horse than many a rake,
And he was none too fat, I'll undertake,

But gazed quite hollowly, and soberly.
His jacket threadbare, where the eye could see;
For he had not yet found a benefice,
Far too unworldly ever to seek office.
He would rather have at his bed-head
Twenty books, clad in black or red,
Of Aristotle and his philosophy,
Than rich robes, fiddle, and sweet psaltery.
But though he was a true philosopher
No stone for making gold lay in his coffer!
But every single penny his friends lent,
On books and on learning it was spent,
And for the souls he offered up a prayer,
Of those who funded him to be a scholar.
Of study he took most care, and most heed.
He spoke not one word more than he need,
And that was formal, said with reverence,
Short, and quick, and in a noble sentence.
Agreeing with moral virtue all his speech,
And gladly would he learn, and gladly teach.
A SERGEANT AT LAW, wise and cautious,
Often consulted at St Paul's porch and such,
Was also there, rich in excellence.
Discreet he was, a man for reverence –
Or so he seemed, his words being so wise.
He had often been a Justice at assize,
By letters patent and by full commission.
By his science and his high renown
Of fees and robes he garnered many a one.
So great a buyer of land was never known;
All was his in fee-simple, in effect.
His purchases were not the least suspect.
More business than he had, no man has,
And yet he seemed busier than he was.
He had correctly cases, judgements, all
From King William's time in men's recall.
Moreover he could draw up anything,

That no man might find fault with its drafting;
And every statute he could cite by rote,
He rode along in a simple striped coat,
Tied with a silken belt, its clasps of metal;
Of his array I will no further tell.
A FRANKLIN was in his company;
White was his beard as is the daisy.
Of his complexion he was sanguine;
He loved a sop in wine each morning.
To live in delight was ever his wont,
For he was Epicurus' very son,
Who held the view that perfect delight
Was the true felicity outright.
A hospitable householder was he
Saint Julian he was to his county.
His bread and ale always second to none;
And no better wine than his was known.
His house was never short of fish and flesh,
Of pastry dishes, and all so plenteous
It snowed in his house with meat and drink,
And all the dainties of which men might think.
In accordance with the seasons of the year,
So he changed his dinner and his supper.
Full many a fat partridge had he in coop,
And many a bream and pike in the pool.
Woe to his cook unless his sauces were
Pungent and tasty, and every dish prepared!
His table fixed in his hall stood always
Ready set with covers, every day.
At court-sessions he was lord and sire;
And oftentimes was Member for the Shire.
A two-edged dagger and a purse of silk
Hung at his girdle, white as morning milk.
A Sheriff had he been, and a lawyer;
Nowhere lived so worthy a landowner.
A HABERDASHER, CARPENTER, a WEAVER
A DYER too, and TAPESTRY-MAKER,

Were there all clothed in the livery
Of their imposing guild fraternity.
Full fresh and new their costume was;
Their knives were mounted not with brass
But all with silver, wrought clean and well,
Their girdles and their pouches as befell.
Each of them seemed a splendid burgess
Fit to grace a guildhall on a dais.
Each owning as much wisdom as man can,
Was suitable to be an alderman,
For they had property enough and rent,
And wives too who would give their assent.
They would be blamed for sure were it not done;
It is a fine thing to be called 'Madame',
And go to vigil before the celebration,
With mantle royally carried, on occasion.
A COOK they had with them I own
To boil the chickens with the marrow-bones,
And pungent flavouring, spices without fail.
Well could he distinguish London ale;
He could roast and seethe and boil and fry,
Make thick soup and bake a tasty pie.
But a mortal pity, it seemed to me,
That on his shin an ulcerous sore had he.
Yet a fricassee, he made it with the best.
A SHIPMAN was there, from out the west;
A Dartmouth man for all I understood.
He rode a hired hack, as best he could,
In a woollen gown that reached his knee,
A dagger hanging on a cord had he,
About his neck, under his arm, and down.
The summer heat had tanned his visage brown.
And certainly he was a splendid fellow;
Full many a draught of wine he made flow
From Bordeaux, the merchant fast asleep,
The nicer rules of conscience did not keep:
If he fought, and gained the upper hand,

He sent men home by water to every land.
As for his skill in calculating tides,
Currents, and every other risk besides,
Harbours and moons, on every voyage,
There was none such from Hull to Carthage.
Hardy he was, wise in his undertakings,
In many a tempest had his beard been shaken.
He knew all the havens that there were
From Gotland's Isle to Cape Finisterre,
And every creek in Brittany and Spain;
The barque he owned was called the *Magdalene*.
With us there was a DOCTOR OF PHYSIC.
In all this world none ever saw his like
On points of physic and of surgery,
For he was grounded in astronomy.
He knew the best hours for the sick,
By the power of his natural magic.
And could select the right ascendant
For making talismans for his patient.
He knew the cause of every malady,
Whether of hot or cold, or moist and dry,
And where engendered, of what humour;
He was a truly perfect practitioner.
The cause known, and of the ill its root,
He gave the sick man remedy to suit.
To send him medicines, his apothecaries
And potions too, they were ever ready,
For each enhanced the other's profiting –
There needed no new friendship there to win.
He was well-versed in Aesculapius,
And Dioscorides and likewise Rufus,
Old Hippocrates, Hali and Galen,
Serapion, Rhazes and Avicen,
Averroes, Damascenus, Constantinus,
Bernard, and Gaddesden, and Gilbertus.
In his diet quite moderate was he,
For it avoided superfluity,

But nourishing it was, digestible.
He made little study of the Bible.
In red and blue, and colours of that ilk,
Lined with taffeta, was clad, and silk.
And yet he was most careful of expense;
He kept the money won from pestilence.
For gold in physic is a cordial;
Therefore he loved gold above all.
  A good WIFE was there from next to BATH,
But pity was that she was somewhat deaf.
In cloth-making she was excellent,
Surpassing those of Ypres and of Ghent.
In all the parish there was no wife, so
Before her to the Offertory might go –
And if they did, indeed, so angry she
That she was quite put out of charity.
Her kerchiefs were finely wove I found;
I dare to swear those weighed a good ten pounds,
That on a Sunday she wore on her head.
Here hose were of a fine scarlet red,
And tightly tied: her shoes full soft and new.
Bold was her face, and fair and red of hue.
Had been a worthy woman all her life;
Husbands at the church-door she had five,
Besides other company in her youth –
No need to speak of that just now, in truth.
And thrice had she been to Jerusalem;
She had crossed many a foreign stream.
At Boulogne she had been, and Rome,
St James of Compostella, and Cologne,
And she knew much of wandering by the way,
Gap toothed was she, truthfully to say.
At ease upon a saddle-horse she sat,
Well wimpled, and on her head a hat
As wide as a small buckler or large shield,
Her large hips an over-skirt concealed,
And on her feet a pair of sharp spurs sat.

In fellowship she loved to laugh and chat;
And remedies for love she had, by chance,
For in that art she knew the oldest dance.
  A holy man there was of good renown,
Who was a poor PARSON to a town,
But rich he was in holy thought and works.
He also was a learned man, a clerk,
That Christ's gospel earnestly would preach;
His parishioners devoutly he would teach.
Benign he was and wondrous diligent,
And in adversity extremely patient,
And proven to be such as many times.
He was loth to curse men over tithes,
But preferred to give, without a doubt,
To the poor parishioners round about,
From his own goods and the offerings,
He found sufficiency in little things.
Wide was his parish, and houses far asunder,
But he neglected naught, in rain or thunder,
In sickness or affliction went to all
The farthest in his parish, great or small,
Upon his feet, and in his hand a stave.
This fine example to his flock he gave,
That first he wrought, and afterward he taught.
Out of the gospel he those words had caught;
And this maxim he would add thereto,
That if gold rust, what should iron do?
For if the priest be foul in whom we trust,
No wonder if the layman turn to rust!
And shame it is, and let priests note, to see
The shepherd doused in shit, the sheep still clean.
The true example the priest ought to give
Is by his cleanness how the sheep should live.
He did not set his benefice to hire
And leave his sheep encumbered in the mire,
Running off to London to Saint Paul's,
To work a wealthy chantry for dead souls,

Or in guild brotherhood remain enrolled
But dwelt at home and cared well for his fold,
So that no wolf should make his task miscarry.
He was a shepherd not a mercenary.
And though he was holy and virtuous,
He did not scorn the sinful, nor because
Of it in speech was proud or over-fine,
But in his teaching was discreet, benign;
To draw folk towards heaven by gentleness,
By good example – such was his business.
But if anyone proved obstinate,
Whoever he was, of high or low estate,
He would rebuke him sharply, him to punish.
A better priest I think there nowhere none is.
He never looked for pomp or reverence,
Nor showed a too fastidious conscience,
But Christ's lore, and his Apostles' twelve,
He taught, but first he followed it himself.
With him there was a PLOUGHMAN, was his brother,
Many a load of dung, one time or other,
He had carted, a good true worker he,
Living in peace and perfect charity.
God loved he best with all his whole heart
At all times, whether with delight or smart,
Then his neighbour loved he as himself.
He would thresh the corn, and dig and delve,
For Christ's sake, grant the poor their hour,
Without reward, if it lay in his power.
His tithes he paid in full, fair and well,
Both of his labour and his capital.
In a loose tunic he rode on a mare.
There was a REEVE also and a MILLER,
A SUMMONER and a PARDONER as well,
A college MANCIPLE, and then myself.
The MILLER was a strong man I own;
A stout fellow, big in brawn and bone.
It served him well, for, everywhere, the man,

At wrestling, always looked to win the ram.
Broad, thick-set, short in the upper arm,
Off its hinges, he lifted any door,
Or ran at it and broke it with his head.
His beard, as any sow or fox, was red,
And broad as well, as if it were a spade.
On the tip of his nose he displayed
A wart, and on it stood a tuft of hair,
Red as the bristles in a sow's ear.
His nostrils were as black as they were wide;
A sword and buckler he wore at his side.
His mouth as great was as a great furnace.
He was a loudmouth and to his disgrace
Told stories most of sin and harlotry.
He stole corn, and made one toll pay three;
Yet had the golden thumb, a mystery!
A white coat and a blue hood wore he;
The bagpipes he could blow well and sound,
And that was how he piped us out of town.
  The MANCIPLE was of the Inner Temple,
All purchasers might follow his example
Of wisdom in the buying of victuals;
For whether he paid cash or owed it all
He was so careful always in his purchase,
That he was all prepared and acted first.
Now is it not a wonder of God's grace
That a man so illiterate can outpace
The wisdom of a host of learned men?
Of masters he had more than thrice ten,
Expert in the law and meritorious,
Of whom there were a dozen in that house
Worthy to be stewards of rent and land
For any lord who lives in England,
And show him the income to be had
Debt-free, from his estates, less he were mad,
Or be as frugal as he should desire;
And they were able to assist a shire

In any case that chanced to arise –
And yet this Manciple outdid the wise.
The REEVE was a slender, choleric man.
His beard was shaved as close as any can;
His hair by his ears was fully shorn;
The top was cropped like a priest before.
His legs were long, and very lean,
Like sticks they were – no calves to be seen.
He kept a tidy granary and bin;
No auditor could get the best of him.
Well could he judge from drought or rain
The yield of his seed and of his grain.
His lord's sheep, beef-cattle, and his dairy,
His swine, his horses, stock and poultry,
Was wholly in this Reeve's governance
And he made reckoning by covenant,
Since his lord had only twenty years;
No man could find him ever in arrears.
No bailiff, cowherd, servant of any kind
But their deceits and tricks were in his mind;
They feared him like the plague, is my belief.
He had a pleasant dwelling on a heath,
With green trees shadowed was the sward.
He could purchase better than his lord;
He had riches of his own privately.
He could please his lord subtly,
Giving and lending of his own goods,
And earn his thank you and a coat and hood.
In youth he had a good and learned master;
He was a fine craftsman, a carpenter.
This Reeve sat on a farm-horse that was
All dappled grey and bore the name of Scot.
A long bluish top-coat he displayed,
And by his side he bore a rusty blade.
Of Norfolk was this Reeve of whom I tell,
Near a town that men call Bawdeswell.
His gown was tucked up like a friar's about,

And he always rode the hindmost on the route.
A SUMMONER was with us in that place,
Who had a fiery-red cherubim's face,
Carbuncled so, and his eyes were narrow.
He was hot and lecherous as a sparrow,
With scabby black brows and scrubby beard;
Of his visage children were a-feared.
No quicksilver, lead salve, or brimstone,
Borax, ceruse, or oil of tartar known,
No ointment that would cleanse and bite,
Could cure him of his pimples white,
Or of the lumps rising from his cheeks.
Well loved he garlic, onions, and leeks,
And to drink strong wine, as red as blood;
Making him speak, and cry, as madman would.
And when he had drunk, and the wine was in,
Then he would speak no word but Latin.
A few tags he had, some two or three,
That he had learned out of some decree –
No wonder, since he heard them every day.
And you well know moreover how a jay
Can say 'Walter' better than the Pope –
But try any other matter's scope,
Then had he spent all his philosophy;
Ay '*Questio quid iuris*' was his plea.
He was a noble rogue and a kind;
A better fellow no man could find.
He would allow, for a quart of wine,
A good friend to keep a concubine
A twelvemonth and excuse him fully;
And he could pluck a fool privately.
And if he made a good friend anywhere,
He would teach him not to have a care
In such a case of the Archdeacon's curse,
Unless a man's soul lay in his purse,
For in his purse he should punished be.
'The purse is the Archdeacon's hell,' said he.

But well I know he lied in what he said;
For his curse each guilty man should dread,
Since absolution saves, but slays that writ,
And so ware of that word *Significavit*.
He had in his power as he pleased
All the young folk of the diocese,
Knew their secrets, they by him were led.
A garland had he set upon his head,
Big as an inn-sign's holly on a stake;
A buckler he had made him of a cake.

With him there rode a noble PARDONER
Of Charing Cross, his friend and his peer,
Returned directly from the Court of Rome.
He sang out loud: 'Come hither, love, to me!'
The Summoner sang a powerful bass around;
Never a trumpet of half so great a sound.
The Pardoner had hair as yellow as wax,
But smooth it hung like a hank of flax.
In clusters hung the locks he possessed,
With which his shoulders he overspread;
But thin they fell, in strands, one by one.
But hood, to adorn them, he wore none,
For it was trussed up in his wallet –
He thought he rode fashionably set;
Dishevelled, save his cap, he rode all bare.
Such bulging eyeballs had he as a hare.
A pilgrim badge had he sewn on his cap;
His wallet lay before him in his lap,
Brimful of pardons, come from Rome hotfoot.
A voice he had as small as has a goat;
No beard had he, nor ever looked to have;
As smooth it were as it were lately shaved –
I judge he was a gelding or a mare.
But of his craft, from Berwick unto Ware,
Never was such another Pardoner.
And in his bag a pillow-case was there,
Which he claimed was Our Lady's veil;

He said he had a fragment of the sail
That Saint Peter used, when he skimmed
Upon the sea till Jesus summoned him.
He had a cross of brass set with stones,
And in a glass, he had pigs' bones.
And with these relics, when he had to hand
Some poor parson living on the land,
In one day he gathered in more money
Than the parson in a month of Sundays.
And thus with feigned flattery, his japes
Made people and the parson his apes.
But to tell true from first to last,
He was in church a noble ecclesiast.
He read a lesson well or a story,
But best of all he sang an Offertory.
For well he knew, when that song was sung,
He must preach and well tune his tongue
To win silver, as he well knew how;
Therefore he sang more sweetly and loud.
  Now I have told you in a brief clause,
The array, condition, number and the cause
Whereby assembled was this company,
In Southwark at that noble hostelry
Called *The Tabard*, fast by *The Bell*.
But now the time has come for me to tell
How we behaved on that same night,
At that hostelry where we did alight;
And after will I tell, at every stage,
All the remainder of our pilgrimage.
But first I pray you of your courtesy,
Not to consider me unmannerly
If I speak plainly in this matter,
In telling you their words hereafter,
Though I speak their words literally;
For this you know as well as me,
Whoso tells the tale of another man
Must repeat as closely as he can

Assembling the Canterbury Pilgrims

Every word, if it be in his power,
However coarse or broad his dower
Of words, or else his tale will be untrue,
Or feign things, inventing words anew.
He may spare none, though it were his brother,
Must say the one word if he says the other.
Christ himself spoke plain in Holy Writ,
And you well know no coarseness is in it.
As Plato says, to any who can read,
The words must be cousin to the deed.
Also I beg you, if you will, forgive me
If I have not placed folk in due degree
Here in this tale, as they indeed should stand;
I lack the wit, you may well understand.
  Our HOST made great cheer for everyone,
And down to supper set us all anon.
He served us with victuals of the best:
Strong was the wine, we drank with zest.
A handsome man our Host was withal,
And fit to be a marshal in a hall.
A large man he was with striking eyes;
No fairer burgess was there in Cheapside.
Bold in his speech, and wise, and well taught,
And of honest manhood he lacked naught.
Add that he was a truly merry man;
And after supper jokingly began
To speak of entertainment and other things,
After we had paid our reckonings,
Saying to us: 'Now lordings, truly
To me you are right welcome, heartily!
For by my troth and telling you no lie,
I have not seen this year such folk go by
As gathered together in this tavern now.
And I would entertain, if I knew how,
Yet there is an entertainment, in my thoughts,
To amuse you and it will cost you naught.
  You go to Canterbury – God you speed!

May the blissful martyr bless you indeed! –
And well I know, as you go on your way
You intend to chatter and make hay.
For truly, comfort and delight is none
In riding on the way dumb as a stone.
And therefore I offer you some sport,
As I first said, to give you some comfort.
And if you agree as one and consent
Each of you to accept my judgement,
And to work it as I to you will say,
Tomorrow when you ride on your way,
Now, by my father's soul, he being dead,
If you lack merriment, be it on my head!
Hold up your hands, without longer speech.'
  Our decision was not long to seek:
We thought it not worth serious debating,
And gave him leave, without deliberating,
And bade him give his orders as he wished,
'Lordings,' quoth he, 'now listen to the rest –
But hear me out, I pray, without disdain –
Here is the point, to tell you short and plain:
That each of you, to speed you on your way,
On the journey there, shall tell two tales,
Till Canterbury, I mean it so,
And on the homeward way another two,
Of adventures that did once befall.
And which of you that bears them best of all –
That is to say, who tells in this case
Tales the most serious that most solace –
Shall have a supper and we pay the cost,
Here in this place, sitting by this post,
When that we come again from Canterbury.
And to make you all the more merry,
I will myself gladly with you ride,
All at my own cost, and be your guide.
And whoever my judgement does gainsay
Shall pay all that we spend by the way.

And if you will agree it shall be so,
Tell me now, without more ado,
And I will get me ready for the dawn.'
  The thing was agreed, and our oath sworn
With right good heart, and we begged also
That he accordingly would do so,
And that he act then as our governor,
And of our tales be judge and recorder,
And fix the supper at a certain price,
And we would be ruled by his device,
In high and low, and thus by one assent
We all agreed to his true judgement.
And the wine was brought, thereupon
We drank, and to rest went everyone,
Without our any longer tarrying.
  Next morning, when the day began to spring,
Up rose our Host and roused us like the cock,
And gathered us together in a flock;
And forth we rode, at barely walking-pace
To Saint Thomas, and his watering place.
And there our Host held the reins still,
And said: 'Lordings, hearken if you will!
You know what you agreed, as I record.
If even-song and morning-song accord,
Let us see who shall tell the first tale.
As ever I hope to drink wine and ale,
Whoever is a rebel to my judgement
Shall pay for all that on the way is spent.
Now draw a straw before our journeying;
And he that has the shortest shall begin.
'Sir Knight,' quoth he, 'my master and my lord,
Now make the draw for that is our accord.
Come near,' quoth he, 'my lady Prioress,
And you, Sir Cleric, hide your bashfulness,
No pondering now – a hand from everyone!'
  At once by each the draw was begun;
And to tell you how it was, as I relate,

Whether by happenstance or chance or fate,
The truth is this: the lot fell to the Knight,
Which filled us all with joy and delight.
And tell his tale he must, in due season,
According to our pact and our decision,
As you have heard – what needs more ado?
And when this good man saw that it was so,
As he was wise and given to obedience
And keeping promises with free assent,
He said: 'Since I shall begin the game,
Why, welcome is the outcome, in God's name!
Now let us ride, and hark at what I say.'
And with that word we rode forth on our way,
And he began, all merry and full of cheer
His tale anon, and spoke as you may hear.

End of the General Prologue

THE KNIGHT'S TALE

'Iamque domos patrias Scithice post aspera gentis prelia laurigero' etc.

'And now after fierce battles with the Scythian people (Theseus) nears home in his laurel-crowned (chariot) etc.'

(Statius: Thebaid XII, 519-520)

Here begins the Knight's Tale

nce on a time, as old stories tell us,
There was a Duke whose name was Theseus.
Of Athens he was lord and governor,
And in his time so great a conqueror
Mightier was there none under the sun.
Full many a rich land had he won,
What with his wisdom and his chivalry.
He conquered all the Amazon country,
That long ago was known as Scythia,
And wedded its queen Hippolyta,
And brought her home to his own country
With much glory and great festivity,
And also her young sister Emily.
And so with victory and melody
I'll let this noble Duke to Athens ride
And all his host in arms him beside.
And were it not indeed too long to hear,
I would have told you fully of the manner
In which the Amazon kingdom was seized
By Theseus and by his chivalry,
And of the great battle on occasion
Twixt the Athenian and the Amazon,
And how he besieged Hippolyta,
The brave and lovely queen of Scythia,
And of the feast they had at their wedding
And of the tempest at their home-coming;
But all of that I must omit for now.
I have, God knows, a large field to plough,
Weak oxen pull my blade, the field is rough.
The remnant of my tale is long enough.

Likewise I'll not delay us on the route;
Let every fellow tell his tale about,
And let us see who shall that supper win!
– Where I left off, I will again begin.
  This Duke of whom I now make mention,
When he was almost come into the town,
In all his splendour and his great pride,
Became aware, as he glanced aside,
That there kneeled in the highway
Two by two, a company of ladies,
One behind the other, in clothes black.
But such a wail, such cries they made, alack,
That in this world there is no creature living
That ever heard another such lamenting.
And this crying was not heard to cease
Till they the reins of his bridle seized.
  'What folk are you that at my home-coming
So disturb my feast with your crying?
Quoth Theseus. 'Do you so envy my
Honour that thus you complain and cry?
Who has maltreated you or offended?
And tell me if what's done may be amended,
And why you are clothed thus all in black.'
  The eldest lady of them all spoke back,
Swooning, so deathly-white she did appear,
That it was pitiful to see and hear,
And said: 'Lord to whom Fortune doth give
Victory, you who as a conqueror do live,
We do not mourn your glory and honour,
But we beseech your mercy and succour.
Have mercy on our woe and our distress!
Some drop of pity, in your graciousness,
Upon us wretched women let it fall.
For sure, my lord, there is none of us all
That has not been a duchess or a queen.
Now we are captives, as can well be seen,
Thanks be to Fortune and her fickle wheel,

That no estate lets full assurance feel.
Indeed, lord, to attend your presence we
In this divine temple of Clemency
Have been waiting all this long fortnight.
Now help us lord, since you possess the might!
  I, wretched Queen, that weep and wail thus
Was once the wife of King Capaneus
Who died at Thebes – accursed be the day! –
And all of us in all our sad array
Who are making this fond lamentation,
We all lost our husbands in that town,
While the siege thereabout it lay.
And yet now old Creon, sad to say,
That is now the lord of Thebes the city,
Filled full with anger and iniquity,
He out of spite, and out of tyranny,
To do the dead bodies villainy
Of all our lords that have been slain,
Has all the bodies in a heap lain,
And will not give his order and assent
For them to be buried or be burnt,
But lets the dogs eat them, out of spite.'
And with that word, without more respite,
They fell prone and cried piteously:
Have on us wretched women some mercy,
And let our sorrow penetrate your heart!'
  The noble Duke with pity gave a start,
Leapt from his horse as he heard her speak.
He thought that his own heart would break
At seeing such piteous victims of fate,
That had once been of such great estate.
And raised them in his arms, and then
Comforted them with generous intent,
And swore his oath, as being a true knight,
He would so vigorously apply his might
To the tyrant Creon, vengeance on him wreak,
That all the people of Greece would speak

Of how Theseus their Creon served,
As one whose death was richly deserved.
And at once, with little more delay,
He rode forth, his banner did display
Towards Thebes, and all his host beside.
No nearer Athens would he go or ride,
Nor rest at ease scarcely half a day,
But onward on his way that night he lay,
And sent, at once, the Queen, Hippolyta,
And Emily, her beautiful young sister,
To the town of Athens there to dwell,
And forth he rode; there is no more to tell.
  The image of red Mars, with spear and shield
So shone on his white banners, in the field,
That all the meadows glittered up and down,
And with his banner, his pennon of renown,
Of gold full rich, on which there was a beast,
The Minotaur, whom he had slain in Crete.
So rode the Duke, so rode this conqueror,
And in his host of chivalry the flower,
Till he came to Thebes, there did alight,
Fair in a field, where he thought to fight.
  But to speak briefly now of this thing,
With Creon, he that was of Thebes king,
He fought, and slew him like a manly knight
In open battle, and put the folk to flight.
And by assault he won the city after,
And razed the walls, every spar and rafter;
And to the ladies he restored again
The bones of their husbands that were slain,
To perform their obsequies, in usual guise.
Though it were all too long to devise
The great clamour and the sad lamenting
That the ladies made at the burning
Of the bodies, and the great honour
That Theseus the noble conqueror
Did the ladies, when their way they went;

For to speak briefly, such is my intent.
When that this worthy Duke, this Theseus,
Had slain Creon and conquered Thebes thus,
Still in the field he took all night his rest,
And with the country did as pleased him best.
To ransack the heaped bodies of the dead,
To strip them of armour, and clothes indeed,
The pillagers worked busily, with care,
After the battle and the victory there.
And it so befell that in the heap they found,
Pierced with many a grievous bloody wound,
Two young knights, lying side by side,
Both in like armour, richly wrought beside;
Of whom, Arcita was the name of one,
That of the other knight was Palamon.
Not fully quick nor fully dead they were,
But by their coats of arms and their gear
The heralds knew them, amongst them all,
And that they were of the blood royal
Of Thebes, and of two sisters born.
Out of the heap the pillagers have them borne
And gently carry them to Theseus' tent
And he at once has them swiftly sent
To Athens, to be confined in prison
Perpetually; allowing them no ransom.
And when the noble Duke had so done,
He took his horse and home he rode anon,
Crowned with laurel as a conqueror;
And there he lived in joy and in honour
All his life; what more need I say now?
And in a tower, in anguish and in woe,
Dwelled this Arcita and this Palamon,
For ever; no gold could buy their freedom.
So passed year on year, and day on day,
Until one morning in the month of May
Young Emily, she fairer to be seen
Than is the lily on its stalk of green,

And fresher than the May with flowers new –
For with the rose's colour strove her hue;
I know not which was finer of the two –
Ere it was day, as she was wont to do,
She has risen, and dressed at first light,
For May will have no slothfulness a-night,
The season pricks at every gentle heart,
And makes it from its sleep begin to start,
And says: 'Arise, perform your observance!'
And this made Emily rouse her remembrance
Of the honour due to May, and so to rise.
She was clothed fresh to watching eyes;
Her yellow hair was braided in a tress
Behind her back, a yard long, I guess.
And in the garden, as the sun up-rose,
She walked up and down, and as she chose
Gathered flowers, mingled, white and red,
To make a woven garland for her head,
And sang like an angel, as she went along.
The great tower, that was so thick and strong,
That of the castle was the chief dungeon,
In which the knights were imprisoned,
Of which I told, and will tell you all,
Was closely bonded to the garden wall
Near which this Emily did her walking.
Bright was the sun and clear that morning,
And Palamon, that woeful prisoner,
As was his wont, by leave of his gaoler,
Had risen and he roamed a room on high,
Where all the noble city met his eye,
And so the garden, full of branches green,
Where this fresh Emily the sweetly seen
Was at play, and she roamed up and down.
This sorrowful prisoner, this Palamon,
Pacing the chamber, roaming to and fro
And to himself complaining of his woe;
That he was born, he often cried 'alas!'

Fair Emily Gathering Flowers

And so it befell, by chance or happenstance,
That through a window, thick with many a bar
Of iron large and square as any spar,
He cast his eye upon Emilia,
And thereupon he blanched, and cried 'Ah!'
As though he had been stung to the heart.
And with that cry Arcita gave a start
And said: 'My cousin, what aileth thee,
Who are so pale and death-like to see?
Why did you cry out? Who gives offence?
For God's love, show every patience
With our prison, not otherwise can it be!
Fortune has sent us this adversity.
Some weak aspect or disposition
Of Saturn, in some configuration,
Has yielded this, however we have sworn;
So stood the heavens when that we were born.
We must endure; that is the short and plain.'
And Palamon answered, and spoke again:
'Cousin, indeed, you are in confusion,
You are deceived in your imagination.
This gaol was not the reason for my cry,
But I was wounded now, through the eye
To the heart, it will be the death of me.
The beauty of that lady that I see
Yonder in the garden roaming to and fro
Is the cause of all my crying and my woe.
I know not if she be woman or a goddess,
But Venus she is in truth, I'd guess.'
And with that on his knees down he fell
And said: Venus, if it be your will
To appear before me in this figure
In that garden, a sorrowful wretched creature,
Out of this prison help us to escape.
And if my destiny is already shaped
By eternal word to die in prison,
On our lineage have some compassion,

That is brought so low by tyranny.'
And at that word Arcita chanced to see
This lady as she roamed to and fro,
And at the sight her beauty hurt him so,
That if Palamon had been wounded sore,
Arcita hurts as much as him or more.
And with a sigh he says piteously:
'The fresh beauty slays me suddenly
Of her that roams about in yonder place,
And but I have her mercy and her grace,
That I may see her, at the least, some way,
I am but dead; there is no more to say.'
  Now Palamon when he heard these words,
Looked at him angrily and so answered:
'Say you this in earnest, or in play?'
'Nay,' quoth Arcita, 'in earnest, by my faith!
God help me so, I have no wish to play.'
Palamon began to knit his brow, and say:
'There accrues to you,' he quoth, 'no honour
In being false, or proving now a traitor
To me, who am your cousin and your brother
Deeply sworn, and each bound to the other,
That never, lest we both may die in pain,
Never, until death shall part us twain,
Shall either in love be hindrance to the other,
Nor in any other way, my dear brother,
Rather you should truly further me
In every case, as I shall further thee.
This was your oath and mine also, I say,
I know in truth you dare not it gainsay.
So are you my confidant, beyond doubt.
And now you will falsely be about
Loving my lady, whom I love and serve
And ever shall, as long as heart deserve.
Now indeed, false Arcita, you shall not so!
I loved her first, and told you of my woe
As my confidant, and my brother sworn

To further me, as I have said before.
By which you are bound as a true knight
To help me, if it lies within your might,
Or else you will prove false, I dare maintain!'
  Then Arcita proudly answered him again:
'You shall,' he quoth, 'rather be false than I.
And you are false, I tell you that outright;
For par amour I loved her first, not you.
What did you say? You scarcely knew
Whether she was a woman or a goddess?
Your is affection born of holiness,
And mine is love as for the creature,
And that is why I told you at a venture,
Being my cousin and my brother sworn.
Suppose it so that you loved her before:
Do you not know the old clerks' saw,
'Who shall bind a lover with the law?'
Love is a greater law, by head and hand,
Than is imposed by any earthly man.
And therefore social laws and such decrees
Are broken each day for love, by all degrees.
A man must love, despite himself, give heed;
He may not flee it though he die, indeed,
Be she a maid, a widow, or a wife.
And then you are little likely, in this life,
To stand in grace with her; no more shall I.
You know too well, yourself, and no lie,
That you and I are condemned to prison
Perpetually; and granted no ransom
We strive as the hounds did for the bone;
They fought all day and neither did it own.
There came a kite, while they were waxing wrath,
And carried off the bone between them both.
And therefore, at the king's court, my brother,
Each man for himself; law there's none other.
Love if you wish; I love, and ever shall.
And truly believe, brother, this is all:

Here in this prison must we endure;
And each of us our own chance assure.'
  Great was the strife and long between the two,
If I had leisure to tell it all to you.
But to the point: it happened on a day,
To explain it as briefly as I may,
A worthy Duke, named Pirithous,
Who had been friends with Duke Theseus
Since the days when they were children,
Had come to Athens, visiting his friend,
And to amuse himself as he would do;
For in this world he loved no man so,
And he was loved as tenderly again.
So well they loved, as the old books say,
That when the one was dead, true to tell,
His friend went and sought him down in Hell.
But that is not the story I write here.
Duke Pirithous truly loved Arcita,
And knew him well at Thebes many a year,
And finally, at the request and prayer
Of Pirithous, without any ransom,
Duke Theseus let him out of prison,
To go free, wherever he might choose,
In such a guise as I shall tell to you.
  This was the pledge, let me plainly write,
Between Theseus and Arcita, this I cite,
That if so be it Arcita was found,
Ever in life, by day or night, on ground
That in any way belonged to Theseus,
And he were caught, it was agreed thus:
That with a sword he should lose his head.
There was no other remedy be it said,
But to take his leave, and homeward step.
Let him beware; his pledge is now his neck.
  How great a sorrow Arcita reveals!
The stroke of death in his heart he feels.
He weeps, he wails, he cries piteously;

He waits to slay himself secretly.
He says: 'Alas the day that I was born!
Now is my prison worse than before;
Now am I doomed eternally to dwell
Not in Purgatory, but in Hell.
Alas that ever I knew Perithous!
Else I had dwelt with Theseus
Fettered in his prison, evermore so;
Then had I been in bliss, and not in woe.
Only the sight of she whom I serve,
Though that I never her grace may deserve,
Would have sufficed right enough for me.
'O dear cousin Palamon,' quoth he,
'Yours is the victory in this venture!
Full blissfully in prison you endure –
In prison? No, for sure, in Paradise.
Well for you has Fortune cast the dice,
You have sight of her, and I the absence.
For it is possible, since you have her present,
And are a knight, and one noble and able,
That by chance, since Fortune's changeable,
You may sometime your desire attain.
But I that am exiled, destitute again
Of all grace, and in such great despair
That neither earth nor water, fire nor air,
Nor creature that of them compounded is,
May help me or comfort me in this,
Now I must die in sadness and distress.
Farewell my life, my joy, and my gladness!
  Alas, why do folk in general moan
About God's providence or Fortune,
That often yields to them in many a guise
Much better fates than they themselves devise?
Some man is so desirous of riches,
They cause his murder, or a great sickness.
Another man that would his freedom gain,
Is freed, then by his own household slain.

Infinite harm is hidden in this matter;
We know not what it is we pray for here.
We fare as one that drunk is as a mouse:
A drunken man knows he has a house,
But knows not the right way thither,
And to a drunken man it's slide and slither.
And that is how for sure in this world we
Go searching hard to find felicity,
But we go wrong so often, tell no lie.
Thus may we all say, and so will I,
That had gone and formed the grand opinion
That if I might escape from prison,
Then I would be in joy and perfect health,
Where instead I am exiled from my wealth,
Since that I may not see you, Emily.
I am but dead; there is no remedy.'
  Now on the other hand Palamon,
When he knew that Arcita had gone,
Such sorrow made that the great tower
Echoed to his yowling and his clamour.
The very fetters on his shins yet
Were with his bitter salt tears wet.
'Alas,' quoth he, 'Arcita, cousin mine,
Of all our strife, God knows, comes meagre wine!
You walk now in Thebes at your large,
And with my woe you are little charged.
You may, possessing wisdom and manhood,
Assemble all the folk among our kindred,
And start so fierce a war in this city
That by some venture, or some treaty,
You may have her to be your lady wife
For whose sake I must needs lose my life.
For, as regards the possibility,
Since you are now at large, of prison free,
And are a lord, great is your advantage,
More than mine who starve here in a cage.
For I must weep and wail while I live,

With all the woe that prison life may give,
And with the pain that love grants also,
That doubles my torment and my woe.'
  With that he felt the fire of envy start
Within his breast, and seize him by the heart,
So furiously he like was to behold
As box-wood, pale, or ashes dead and cold.
  Then said he: 'O cruel goddess, that controls,
This world with your eternal words enfolds,
Engraving in your tables of adamant
The eternal destinies that you will grant,
What more is mankind to you of old
Than a flock of sheep cowering in a fold?
For man is slain as easily as any beast,
And dwells alike in prison, and is seized,
And suffers sickness, great adversity,
And often he is guiltless, indeed.
What justice is there in your prescience
That torments guiltless innocence?
And yet all my penance is increased:
For man is bound to do as he agreed,
For God's sake, in curbing of his will,
Whereas a beast may all its lust fulfil.
And when a beast is dead it feels no pain,
But man after death must weep again,
Though in this world he had care and woe;
Without a doubt, things may happen so.
The answer to this I leave to the divines;
But well I know that in this world man pines.
Alas, I see a serpent or a thief,
That to many a man has done mischief,
Go where he wishes, and at will return,
But I must be imprisoned through Saturn,
And Juno, jealous and furious, who would
Destroy well nigh all the Theban blood,
And Thebes itself, its ruined walls spread wide,
While Venus slays me from the other side,

For jealousy and fear of Arcita.'
  Now will I turn from Palamon and here
Leave him in his prison now to dwell,
And of Arcita on the instant tell.
  The summer passes, and the nights long
Increase in double wise the pains strong,
Both of the lover and the prisoner.
I know not which of them is the sadder:
For briefly for to tell, this Palamon
Is damned perpetually to prison,
In chains and fetters to his final breath;
Arcita is banished, on pain of death,
Exiled for evermore from that country,
And nevermore his lady shall he see.
  You lovers, now I ask of you this question:
Who suffers worst, Arcita or Palamon?
The one may see his lady day by day,
But in prison he must dwell always;
The other where he wishes ride or go,
But he shall see his lady nevermore.
Judge as it pleases you, who know and can,
For I will finish that which I began.

PART TWO

hen that Arcita at Thebes arrived was,
All the day he languished, cried 'alas!'
For he shall see his lady nevermore.
And briefly to conclude all his woe,
So much sorrow had never a creature
That is or shall be while the world endures.
Of sleep, of meat, of drink, he is bereft,
So that he waxes dry as a spear-shaft;
His eyes hollow and grisly to behold,
His hue sallow and pale as ashes cold.
And solitary he was and ever alone,
And wailing all the night, making his moan.
And if he heard a song or instrument,
Then he would weep, to infinite extent.
So feeble were his spirits and so low,
And changed so that no man might know
His speech, nor his voice, that they heard.
And in his manner for all the world he fared
As not only seized with lovers' malady
Of heroes, rather with the lunacy
Engendered by a humour melancholic
Up top, in his cerebrum fantastic.
And briefly, was so turned upside-down
In body and disposition, foot to crown,
Of this woeful lover, Sir Arcita
Why write all day about his discomposure?
When he had endured two years or so
Of this cruel torment, this pain and woe,
At Thebes, in his own country, as I said,
Upon a night, asleep, and in his bed,

He thought he saw the winged god Mercury
Standing before him, bidding him be merry.
His wand of sleep he bore in hand upright;
A cap he wore upon his hair bright.
Arrayed was this god, remarked Arcita,
As he was when Argus was the sleeper;
And he said thus: 'To Athens shall you wend,
There to your woe there is ordained an end.'
And these words woke Arcita with a start.
'Now, truly, however much it pains my heart,'
Quoth he, 'to Athens right now will I fare.
Not even for dread of death will I despair
But see my lady that I love and serve;
In her presence from death I shall not swerve.'
And with that word he seized a great mirror,
And saw in it that changed was all his colour,
And saw his visage all of another kind.
And right away it came into his mind
That, since his face was so disfigured
From the sickness that he had endured,
He might well if he kept a humble tone
Live in Athens evermore unknown,
And see his lady well nigh every day.
And so at once he changed his array,
And clad himself as does a labourer;
And all alone, save only for a squire
That knew his secrets and his cause,
And was disguised as humbly as he was,
To Athens is he gone the quickest way.
And to the court he went upon a day,
And at the gate offered his services,
To drudge and draw, whatever men thought best.
And briefly of this matter to explain,
He started work for a chamberlain,
The which was dwelling there with Emily,
For he was wise and swiftly could espy
The worth of every servant caught his eye.

Arcita could hew wood well and water bear,
For young and strong, appropriately grown,
He was tall too, and mighty in the bone
Fit for whatever any could devise.
A year or two he laboured in this wise,
Page of the chamber of Emily the bright,
And Philostrate he named himself aright.
And half so well-beloved a man as he
There never was at court, of his degree.
He was so noble in his low condition
That throughout the court ran his renown.
They said that it would be a charity
If Theseus were to heighten his degree,
And some nobler service then devise
Where he might his virtue exercise.
And thus in a while his name had sprung
To every lip, for deeds and courteous tongue,
So that Theseus advanced him higher
And of his chamber made him a squire,
And gave him gold to maintain his degree.
And men too brought him from his own country
Year by year, and secretly, his rent.
And secretly and honestly was it spent,
That no man wondered at what he had.
And three years in this wise this life he led,
And bore him so in peace and in war,
There was no man Theseus liked more.
And in this bliss I now will leave Arcita
And speak I will of Palamon the lover.
In that dark and horribly strong prison,
This seven-year has lived our Palamon,
Pining away in sorrow and distress.
Who feels a double grief and heaviness
But Palamon whom love tortures so
That he is almost maddened by his woe?
And moreover he is a prisoner
Perpetually, and not just for a year.

Who could rhyme in English properly
His martyrdom? Truly, it is not I!
Therefore I pass on lightly as I may.
  It fell that in the seventh year, of May
The third night (as the old books say
That tell this story in a fuller way),
Whether by chance or by destiny –
As when a thing happens it must be –
That soon after midnight, Palamon
Helped by a friend, broke from the prison,
And fled the city as fast as he could go.
For he had given his gaoler drink, so
Of a honeyed cup of a certain wine,
With narcotics and Theban opium fine,
That all night, though men did him shake,
The gaoler slept; and no man could him wake.
Thus Palamon flees as fast as ever he may.
The night was short and it was near to day,
So of necessity he must him hide.
And into a grove there close beside
With fearful foot stalked our Palamon.
For, briefly, it was his opinion
That in the grove he might hide all day,
And then in the night be on his way
Towards Thebes, his friends there to pray
To arm themselves and Theseus to assail.
And, briefly, either he would lose his life,
Or win Emily to be his wife.
This is the gist and his intention plain.
  Now will I turn to Arcita again,
Who little knew how soon he must prepare
For fate, till Fortune caught him in her snare.
  The busy lark, the messenger of day,
Salutes, with song, the morning grey,
And fiery Phoebus rises up so bright
That all the Orient laughs with light,
And with his rays falling on the trees

Dries the silver droplets on the leaves.
And Arcita, that in the court so royal
Of Theseus is a squire, the principal,
Has risen, and regards the cheerful day,
And to offer his observances to May,
Remembering the object of his desire,
He on a courser, quivering like fire,
Rides out into the fields in play,
Our of the court, a mile or two away;
And towards the grove of which I told
By chance his intention did unfold
To make a garland such as one weaves
Either of hawthorn or of woodbine leaves.
And loud he sung in the sunlit scene:
'May, with all your flowers, so green,
Welcome to you, fairest freshest May,
In hopes that get some greenery I may.'
And from his courser, with a cheerful heart,
Into the grove full hastily, apart,
He entered, and there roamed up and down,
Where by that happenstance our Palamon
Was hiding in the bushes, that none might see,
For sore afraid of meeting death was he.
He had no way to know it was Arcita;
God knows he would have thought it any other!
But so is it said, and has been many a year,
'The fields have eyes, and the woods have ears.'
A man should practise equanimity,
For in unexpected places men may meet.
Little, Arcita knew of his friend in hiding
So near to him he could hear him singing,
For among the bushes he sat, perfectly still.
When of roaming Arcita has had his fill,
And has sung all his roundel gaily,
Into a reverie he falls suddenly,
As these lovers do, with their strange desires –
Now in the tree-tops, now among the briars,

Now up, now down, like a bucket in a well;
Just like a Friday, if truth be to tell,
Shining one moment, and then raining fast.
So is changeable Venus overcast
In her folks' hearts; and just as her day
Is changeable, so then is her array.
Seldom are Friday and other days alike.
  When Arcita had sung, he began to sigh,
And sat himself down as if forlorn.
'Alas', quoth he, 'the day that I was born!'
How long, Juno, in your cruelty
Will you make war against Thebes' city?
Alas, all things are brought to confusion
The royal blood of Cadmus and Amphion –
Of Cadmus, who was indeed the first man
To build at Thebes, and that town began,
And of that city was first crowned king.
Of his lineage am I, and his offspring,
By true line, and of the blood royal.
And now I am so slavish and in thrall
That he that is my mortal enemy
I serve him as his squire, all humbly.
Yet Juno does me a greater shame,
I dare not acknowledge my own name;
And where I once was Arcita by right,
Now I am Philostrate, not worth a mite.
Alas, you cruel Mars, alas Juno!
Thus has your anger shorn our lineage so,
Save only me and wretched Palamon,
Whom Theseus martyrs in his prison.
After all this, to slay me utterly,
Love has his fiery dart so burningly
Thrust through my true sorrowful heart,
That my death was shaped from the start.
Emily, you have slain me with your eye!
You are the reason that I have to die.
On all of the rest of my other cares

I'd set not the value of a heap of tares,
If I could only please you by some chance.'
And with these words he fell down in a trance
For a length of time, then gave a start.
  Now Palamon, who thought that through his heart
He felt a cold sword suddenly glide,
Shook with anger; no longer would he hide.
And when he had heard Arcita's tale,
As if he were mad, face deathly pale,
He started up out of the bushy thicket,
And cried: 'Arcita, traitor false and wicked!
Now you are trapped, who love my lady so,
For whom I suffer all this pain and woe,
Who are of my blood, my friend or so you swore,
As I have told you many times before,
And here you have tricked Duke Theseus,
Falsely concealed your true name thus!
You will be killed, or else kill me;
You shall not have my lady Emily,
I alone will love her, no other so.
For I am Palamon, your, mortal foe,
And though I have no weapon in this place,
But out of prison am escaped by grace,
I doubt not you will be slain by me,
Or else forgo the love of Emily.
Choose as you will, you shall not depart!'
  Then Arcita with a scornful heart,
When he knew him, and his tale had heard,
As fierce as a lion pulled out his sword
And said thus: 'By God that sits above,
Were it not you are sick and mad with love,
And have no weapon too in this place,
You would never out of this grove pace
Without you meeting death at my hand.
For I defy the pledge, and the bond
Which you say I have made with thee.
Fool that you are, bethink you, love is free,

And I will love her, despite all your might!
But inasmuch as you are a noble knight,
And willing to lay claim to her in battle,
Hear my word: tomorrow I will not fail,
For, without telling any man this night,
Here then I will be found, a true knight,
And I will bring armour enough for thee,
Choose you the best, and leave the worst for me.
And meat and drink this night will bring,
Enough for you, and clothes for bedding.
And if so happen that you my lady win
And slay me in this wood that I am in,
Then is the lady yours, if so it be.'
  Then Palamon answered: 'I agree.'
And thus they parted till the morrow,
For each had pledged his word, I vow.
  O Cupid, lacking in all charity!
O power that will share no sovereignty!
Truly is it said that love and lordship
Will not willingly brook fellowship;
Well known to Arcita and Palemon.
Arcita rode away towards the town;
And on the morrow, in the dawning light,
Two suits of armour readied for the fight,
Both sufficient and fitting to maintain
The battle in the field between the twain.
And on his horse, alone, as he was born,
He bore the weight of armour in the dawn.
And in the grove, at time and place as set,
This Arcita and Palamon were met.
  A change had overtaken each man's face,
Just like a hunter in the realms of Thrace,
Who stands out in the open with a spear,
When on a hunt for lion or for bear,
And hears the beast come rushing through the trees,
Breaking all the branches and the leaves,
Thinks: 'Here comes my mortal enemy!

Without fail he must die, or death for me;
For either I must slay him in this gap,
Or he slays me if I should meet mishap.'
So both their complexions changed in hue.
  As each of them his bold opponent knew,
There was no 'good day', no other greeting,
But straight away without word or rehearsing,
Each of them began to arm the other,
In as friendly a way as if it were his brother;
And after that with spears sharp and strong
They thrust at each other, wondrous long.
You would have thought that Palamon
In battle was indeed a raging lion,
A cruel tiger Arcita in the fight.
Like two wild boars that fiercely smite,
Frothing white with foam in angry mood;
Up to the ankles they fought in blood.
And in this guise I leaving them fighting well,
And once again of Theseus I will tell.
  Destiny, that Minister-General,
Who executes on earth, over all,
The Providence that God saw long before,
Has such power that though all men swore
The contrary of a thing by yea or nay,
Yet there will come to pass upon a day
What will not happen in a thousand years.
For certainly our appetites down here,
Be they for war, or peace, hate or love,
All are ruled by the vision that's above.
This will explain why mighty Theseus,
Of hunting is so deeply desirous
And to chase the great stag in May,
That about his bed there dawns no day
When he's not clad and ready for the ride,
With huntsman, horn, and hounds at his side.
For in his hunting he takes such delight
That it is all his joy and appetite

To be himself the great stag's bane;
For after Mars he serves Diana's name.
  Clear was the day, as I have told ere this,
And Theseus, full of joy and bliss
With his Hippolyta, the fair queen,
And Emily, clothed all in green,
Off to the hunt went riding royally.
And to the grove that stood close nearby,
In which there was a stag, so it was told,
Duke Theseus the nearest way he rode,
And to the clearing made his way outright,
For thither the stag would take his flight,
And over a brook, and so forth on his way.
The Duke will try a course or two today,
With hounds singled out at his command.
And when the Duke reached the open land,
Under the sun he gazed, and at once
Was aware of Arcita and Palamon,
Fighting like a pair of bulls, they go.
The bright swords flickered to and fro,
So hideously, that the slightest stroke
Seemed powerful enough to fell an oak.
But who they were, he could not know.
  The Duke his courser with his spurs smote,
And in an instant was between the two,
And pulled out his sword, crying: 'Ho!
No more, punishment be on your heads!
By mighty Mars, he shall soon be dead
That smites one stroke that I shall see.
But tell me what kind of men you be,
Who are so bold to combat here
Without a judge or other officer,
As if you were in the lists, royally.'
  The Palamon answered him speedily
And said, 'Sire, what more need words do?
Death we have deserved, both we two.
Two woeful wretches we, two captives,

That are burdened by our lives;
And as you are our rightful lord and judge,
Then show us neither mercy nor refuge;
But slay me first, for holy charity!
Then slay my fellow too, as well as me –
Or slay him first; though you do not know
This is Arcita, this your mortal foe,
Banished from your land, be it on his head,
For which alone he deserves to be dead.
For this is he who came to your gate,
And said that he was named Philostrate.
So has he deceived you many a year,
Yet you have made him your chief squire.
And this is he that loves Emily.
For since my death-day is come to me,
I make fully my confession
That I am that woeful Palamon
That broke from your prison wickedly.
I am your mortal foe, and it is I
Who love with passion Emily the bright,
That I would die this instant in her sight.
Therefore I ask for judgement and to die.
But slay my fellow in the same wise,
For we have both deserved to be slain.'
  The noble Duke then answered them again
And said: 'This is a brief conclusion!
Your own mouth, by your own confession,
Has condemned you, so I shall record.
There is no need for torture with the cord!
You shall die, by mighty Mars the red!'
  At once the Queen, for very womanliness,
Began to weep, and so did Emily,
And all the ladies in their company.
Great pity was it, as they thought them all,
That ever such a mishap should befall,
For they were noblemen, of great estate,
And over love alone was this debate;

And saw their bloody wounds wide and sore,
And all cried out, both less and more,
'Have mercy, lord, upon us women all!'
And on their bare knees they did fall,
And would have kissed his feet where he stood;
Till finally their weeping calmed his mood,
For pity is quick to rise in noble heart.
And though he shook with anger at the start,
He had considered swiftly, in a pause,
Their mutual trespass, and its cause,
And though his anger saw them both accused,
Yet with his reason he had both excused,
As thus: he well knew that every man
Will help himself to love if he can,
And also deliver himself from prison;
And then his heart filled with compassion
For women, for they weep ever as one:
And in his noble heart he thought anon,
And soft to himself he said: 'Fie
Upon a lord that sees his mercy die,
But is a lion, both in word and deed,
To him that repents and is in dread
As much as to a proud and haughty man,
Who will maintain what he at first began.
That lord has little true discretion
That twixt cases makes no distinction,
But weighs pride and humility as one.'
  And soon as, thus, his anger had gone,
He began to look up, his eyes alight,
And spoke these words, as from a height:
'The God of Love, ah, *Benedicite*!
How mighty and how great a lord, I say!
Against his might there stand no obstacles.
He may be called a god by his miracles,
For he can make, as seems good in his eyes,
Of every heart whatever he might devise.
Lo, here is this Arcita, this Palamon,

That had their freedom from my prison,
And might have lived in Thebes royally,
And know I am their mortal enemy,
And that their death lies in my power too,
And yet has Love, despite their eyes two,
Brought them both hither for to die!
Now see, is that not surely folly's height?
Who is not a fool when he's in love?
Behold, for God's sake who sits above,
See how they bleed! Be they not well arrayed?
Thus has their lord, the God of Love, repaid
With such fees, their service that he buys!
And yet they proclaim themselves so wise
They that serve Love, whatever may befall.
But here is yet the best game of all,
That she for whom they play this lunacy,
Has no more cause to thank them than me!
She knows no more of all this hot affair,
By God, than does a cuckoo or a hare!
But all must be attempted, hot or cold;
A man must play the fool, young or old.
I know it of myself, in years now gone,
For in my time a servant I made one.
And therefore, since I know love's pain,
And how fierce the heart it can constrain,
As one who has been in the net, alas,
I forgive you wholly this trespass.
At the Queen's request who kneels here,
And for Emily too, my sister dear.
And you at once shall both to me swear
Never to harm my country, nor to war
Against me, whether by night or day,
But being friends to me, in all you may,
I forgive you this trespass that befell.'
They swore as he requested fair and well,
And him for lordship and for mercy prayed;
And he granted them grace, and thus he said:

'In terms of royal lineages and riches,
Though she were a queen or a princess,
Each of the two of you is worthy, doubtless,
To wed in due time; yet nevertheless –
I speak as for my sister Emily,
The reason for your strife and jealousy –
You know yourself she cannot wed both
At once, though you fight forever so.
That one of you, regardless of joy or grief,
Must go play tunes upon an ivy-leaf.
That is to say, she cannot now have both,
However jealous you be, or wrath.
And therefore I put it to you simply,
That each of you shall seek his destiny
As it is written, and listen in what wise;
Lo here, your end, I shall now devise.
My will is this, to bring all to conclusion,
Without any kind of protestation –
If you agree, accept it for the best:
Each of you go where fate suggests,
Freely without ransom or danger,
And this day fifty weeks, no later,
Each of you shall bring a hundred knights,
Armed for the lists, prepared to fight,
Ready to lay claim to her in battle.
And this I promise you, without fail,
Upon my truth, and as I am a knight,
That whichever of you both has might –
That is to say whether him or thou –
May with his hundred, that I spoke of now,
Slay his foe, or from the lists him drive,
Then shall he have Emily to wife
To whom Fortune gave so fair a grace.
The tourney I will hold in this place;
And God have mercy on my soul too
If I am not a fair judge and true!
No other agreement shall we make then

But that one of you be dead or taken.
And if you think this all well said,
Be you content, and bow your head.
This is your end and your conclusion.'
  Who looks cheerfully now but Palamon?
Who leaps up for joy but Arcita?
Who could tell or who could write here,
The joy that is revealed in that place,
Where Theseus has shown so fair a grace?
But down on their knees fell all in sight,
And thanked him with all their heart and might,
And especially the Thebans time on time.
And so with good hope, and hearts blithe,
They take their leave and homeward they ride
To Thebes with its walls old and wide.

PART THREE

know men would deem it negligence
If I forgot to tell of the expense
To Theseus, who goes so busily
To construct the lists royally,
That such a noble theatre it was,
I dare well say, as this world has.
The circuit a mile was about,
Walled with stone and ditched without.
Its shape was round, in manner of a compass,
Tier on tier, the height of sixty paces,
So that when a man was in his seat
The fellow sat above him still could see.
Eastward there stood a gate of marble white;
Westward another opposite upright.
And briefly to conclude, such a place
Was never on earth in so small a space.
For in the land was never a craftsman
No geometer, or arithmetician,
No painter or carver of images,
That Theseus gave not meat and wages
To create his theatre and devise,
And to observe his rite and sacrifice,
Eastward he had upon the gate above,
To worship Venus, Goddess of love,
Made an altar and an oratory;
And on the westward gate in memory
Of Mars, had made such another,
That cost a heap of gold, moreover.
And northward in a turret on the wall,
Of alabaster white and red coral

An oratory, rich indeed to see,
In worship of Diana of Chastity,
Theseus had wrought, in noble wise,
  But yet have I forgotten to describe
The noble carving and the portraitures,
The shape, the countenance, and the figures
That adorned these oratories three.
  First in the Temple of Venus, you might see,
Wrought on the wall, pitiful to behold,
The broken sleep, and sighs so cold,
The sacred tears, and the lamenting,
The fiery strokes of fond desiring
That Love's servants in this life endure;
The oaths that their covenants assure,
Pleasure and Hope, Desire, Foolhardiness,
Beauty and Youth, Riches and Joyfulness,
Charms and Force, Deceit and Flattery,
Extravagance, Intrigue, and Jealousy,
That wore of yellow gold a garland,
And a cuckoo sitting on their hand,
Feasts, and instruments, choirs and dance,
Lust and adornment, all the circumstance
Of Love, that I relate and shall, all
By order were portrayed on the wall,
And more of them than I can mention.
For in truth, all the Mount of Cithaeron,
Where Venus has her principal dwelling,
Was shown on the wall in the painting,
With all her garden and its joyfulness.
Nor was forgot the gateman, Idleness,
Nor Narcissus the fair, of times long gone,
Nor yet the folly of King Solomon,
Nor yet the mighty strength of Hercules,
Those enchantments of Medea, and Circe's,
Nor Turnus with courage fierce and hardy,
Rich Croesus, wretched in slavery.
Thus may you see no wisdom or riches,

Beauty or skill, strength or boldness,
May with Venus contend successfully,
For, as she wishes, so the world rules she.
Lo, all these folk into her net so passed,
That they for woe often cried 'alas!'
Suffice it these examples, one or two,
Though I could cite another thousand too.
  The statue of Venus glorious to see,
Was naked, floating in the open sea,
And from the navel down all covered was
With waves green and bright as any glass.
A cithern in her right hand held she,
And on her head, full seemly for to see,
A rose garland, fresh and sweet smelling;
Above her head her doves flickering.
Before her stood her son Cupid too,
Upon his shoulders wings had he two,
And blind he was, as is often seen;
A bow he held and arrows bright and keen.
  Why should I not as well tell you all
The portraiture appearing on the wall
Within the temple of mighty Mars the red?
All painted was the wall in length and breadth,
Like the recesses of that grisly place
They call the great temple of Mars in Thrace,
In that cold and frosty region
Where Mars has his sovereign mansion.
  First on the wall was painted a forest,
In which there dwells nor man nor beast,
With knotty gnarled barren trees old,
Jagged stumps, and hideous to behold,
Through which there ran a roaring and a sigh
As if bough-breaking winds were passing by.
And down beneath a hilly grassed descent,
There stood the temple of Mars omnipotent
In war, wrought all of burnished steel, the gate
Was ghastly for to see, and long and straight.

And from it came a blast of wind, a quake
That made all the portal seem to shake.
The northern light in at the doors shone,
For window in the walls was there none
Through which men might any light discern.
The door was all of adamant eterne,
Riveted crosswise and along
With iron tough, and to make it strong,
Every pillar, to sustain the shrine
Thick as a barrel, of iron bright and fine.
  There saw I first the dark imagining
Of felony, and all its deep conspiring;
Cruel Anger, glowing fierce and red,
The pick-purse, and after him pale Dread;
The smiler with the knife under his cloak;
The cattle-shed burning in black smoke;
Treason, and the murdering in bed;
Open war with wounds that sadly bled;
Contest with bloody knife and sharp Menace;
All filled with creaking was that sorry place.
The slayer of himself yet saw I there
His heart's blood had bathed all his hair;
The nail in the forehead in the night;
The cold death, with mouth gaping wide.
In the midst of the temple sat Mischance,
With comfortless and sorry countenance.
  Yet saw I Madness cackling in his rage,
Armed Clamour, Outcry, and fierce Outrage.
The corpse in the bushes, with cut throat;
A thousand slain, and not by plague I note;
The tyrant with his prey by force bereft;
The town destroyed – there was nothing left.
Yet saw I burnt the dancing ships, and there
The hunter choked to death by wild bears;
The sow gnawing the child in the cradle;
The cook all scalded spite of his long ladle.
Naught was forgot, by influence of Mars,

The carter over-ridden by his cart;
Who beneath the wheel lay dying,
There were also of Mars' devising
The barber, the butcher, the smith who will
Forge you a sharp sword on his anvil.
And all above, depicted on a tower,
Saw I Conquest, seated in great honour,
With the sharp sword above his head
Hanging by a fine and subtle thread.
Depicted was the slaughter of Julius,
Of Nero and Marcus Antonius;
Though in those days they were still unborn,
Yet was their death depicted long before,
By menacing Mars in stars yet to configure.
So was it shown there in that portraiture,
As is revealed in the heavens above,
Who shall be slain, or else die of love.
Let one example do from stories old;
I cannot reckon all that might be told.
  The statue of Mars upon a chariot stood,
Armed and grim, as he were mad enough,
And over his head there shone two figures
Of Geomancy, named in sundry scriptures
The one Puella, the other Rubeus.
This god of weapons was arrayed thus:
A wolf there stood before him at his feet,
With red eyes, and of a man he ate.
With subtle pencil was drawn all the story
In reverence to Mars and his glory.
  Now to the temple of Diana chaste
As swiftly as I can I will make haste,
To give you all of the description.
Painted were the walls, up and down,
With hunting and shame-faced chastity.
There saw I how sad Callisto came to be,
When Diana was aggrieved with her,
Transformed from a woman to a bear,

And after turned into the polar stars.
Thus was it painted; I can tell no more.
Her son's in the stars too, as men may see.
There I saw Daphne turned into a tree;
I mean not the goddess, Diane, to name,
But Peneus' daughter, Daphne, the same.
There I saw Actaeon a stag created,
In punishment for seeing Diane naked.
I saw how his hounds Actaeon caught,
And devoured him when they knew him not.
Yet painted further on, a little more,
How Atalanta hunted the wild boar,
And Meleager, and many a man also,
For which Diana wrought him care and woe.
There saw I many a wondrous story,
Which I care not to recall to memory.
  This goddess high on a stag did sit,
With slender hounds all about her feet,
And underneath her feet there was a moon;
Waxing it was and would be waning soon.
In yellow-green her statue clothed was,
With bow in hand, and arrows in a case,
Her eyes, as she rode, she cast down,
To where Pluto has his dark region.
A woman in travail lay on the ground;
And because her child was not yet born,
Full pitifully on Lucina she did call,
Crying: 'Help, for you can, best of all!'
He could paint to the life, that it wrought,
With many a florin he the colours bought.
  Now the lists were made, and Theseus
Who at his great cost had created thus
The temples and the theatre, as I tell,
When it was done, liked it wondrous well.
But Theseus I will speak of later,
And pass to Palamon and Arcita.
  The day approached for their returning,

When each a hundred knights should bring,
To fight their claim in battle, as I told,
And to Athens, their promise to uphold,
Each has brought with him a hundred knights,
Well armed for war and to maintain the right.
And assuredly it seemed to many a man
That never, since the world itself began,
In respect of fighting hand to hand,
As wide as God had made the sea and land,
Never so few made such true company.
For every fellow that loved chivalry,
And wished for more than a passing name,
Prayed he also might be of the game,
And fortunate for him that chosen was.
For if today there befell such a case,
You well know that every splendid knight
That loves his paramour, and is fit to fight,
Were it in England or indeed elsewhere,
He would be glad and eager to be there.
To fight for a lady, *Benedicite*!
That's a fine sight to see, on any day.
  And so indeed it fared with Palamon.
With him went there knights many a one:
Some chose to be armed in coats of mail,
Worn with a breastplate and a surcoat frail,
While some their suits of plate armour filled,
And some chose bucklers or a Prussian shield,
Some wanted armour on their legs as well
Wielding an axe, and some a mace of steel.
There is no fashion new that is not old!
Armed they were indeed as I have told,
Every man after his own opinion.
  There might you have seen with Palamon,
Lycurgus himself, the great King of Thrace.
Black was his beard and manly was his face.
The circles of the eyes set in his head,
Glowed between a yellow and a red,

And like a griffon he gazed round about,
With shaggy hair on his bushy brows.
His limbs were vast, his muscles hard and strong,
His shoulders broad, his arms round and long.
And as the custom was in his country
High on a chariot of gold stood he,
With four white bulls in the traces.
Instead of coat-armour over his harness,
Yellow with nails and bright as any gold,
He had a bear-skin, old and black as coal.
His long hair was combed behind his back;
As any raven's feather it shone black.
A wreath of gold, thick, and of great weight,
Upon his head sat, full of stones bright,
Of fine rubies and of diamonds.
About his chariot ran snow-white hounds,
Twenty or more, as big as any steer,
To chase after lions or the deer,
And followed him with muzzles tightly bound,
Collared in gold, with leash-rings around.
A hundred lords had he in his rout,
Fully armed, with hearts both stern and stout.
  With Arcita, in story as men find,
The great Emetrius, the King of Inde,
On a bay steed, with trappings of steel,
And cloth of golden weave, haunch to heel,
Came Mars, like the god of weaponry
His surcoat was of cloth of Tartary,
Adorned with pearls, white, round and bold.
His saddle of pure freshly-beaten gold,
A short mantle on his shoulder hanging,
Dense with rubies red, like fire sparkling.
His crisp hair in clustered ringlets done,
And that was yellow, glittering like the sun.
Aquiline nose, his ochreous eyes glowing,
His lips were full, his colour was sanguine.
Some scattered freckles on his face, too

Betwixt black and yellow in their hue,
And like a lion he cast his gaze around.
Of five and twenty years his age, I vow.
His beard had made a good beginning;
His voice was like a trumpet thundering.
Upon his head he wore, of laurel green,
A garland fresh and pleasant to be seen.
Upon his hand he bore for his delight
An eagle tame, as any lily white.
A hundred lords he had with him there,
Armoured, save their heads, in all their gear,
Full richly in every manner of things.
For be assured, that dukes, earls, kings,
Were gathered in that noble company,
For love and in support of chivalry.
About this king there ran on every side
Many a lion and leopard in their pride.
And in this wise these lords, all and one,
Are on this Sunday to the city come,
At nine about, and in the town alight,
  This Theseus, this Duke, this noble knight,
When he had led them into his city,
And housed them, in accord with their degree,
Feasted them, and applied so much labour
To entertaining them, doing them honour,
That men still think and say that no man's wit
However great could ever have bettered it.
  The minstrelsy, the service at the feast,
The great gifts to the highest and least,
The rich adornment of Theseus' palace
Nor who sat first or last on the dais,
Which ladies fairest, or best at dancing,
Or which of them could best chant and sing,
Nor which could speak most feelingly of love,
What hawks were sitting on the perch above,
What hounds were lying on the ground –
Of all of this I make no mention now,

But all that came of it; that thinks me best.
Now here's the point, hearken if you wish.
  That Sunday night ere day began to spring,
When Palamon the lark heard sing –
Though it was not yet day an hour or two
Yet sung the lark – and Palamon then flew,
With holy heart and with noble courage,
Rising at once to make his pilgrimage
To blissful Citherea the benign;
Venus I mean, honourable and divine.
And in her hour he walked out apace,
Towards the lists where her temple was,
And down he knelt, and humble did appear,
With sore heart, he spoke as you shall hear:
  'Fairest of Fair, O my lady Venus,
Daughter to Jove and spouse to Vulcanus,
Who gladden Cithaeron's summit,
By that love you showed Adonis,
Have pity on my bitter tears' smart,
And take my humble prayer to heart.
Alas, I neither language have to tell
Of the effects, nor torments of my hell,
My heart may my hurt not display;
I am so confused what can I say
But 'Mercy, lady bright, who know indeed
My thoughts, and can see the hurt I feel!'
Consider all this, and pity me the more,
As surely as I shall, for evermore,
With all my power, your true servant be,
And evermore make war on chastity.'
This I vow, so long as you help me!
I wield not my weapons boastfully,
Nor do I ask tomorrow's victory,
Nor for renown, nor for the vain glory
Of skill in arms proclaimed up and down;
But I would have complete possession
Of Emily, and die in your service.

Choose you the manner how, in what guise,
I care not, whether it better be,
To have victory of them or they of me,
If I but have my lady in my arms.
For though it be that Mars is god of arms,
Your power is so great in heaven above,
That if you wish it, I shall have my love.
At your temple I will worship evermore so,
And on your altars, wherever I ride or go,
I will make sacrifice, light fires at their feet.
And if you will not so, my lady sweet,
Then pray I that tomorrow with a spear
This Arcita may through my heart pierce.
Then care I not, when I have lost my life,
That Arcita may win her as his wife.
This is the aim and end of my prayer:
Give me my love, you blessed lady dear!'
  When Palamon had made his orison,
His sacrifice he made, and that anon,
Devoutly and with a full observance,
Though I tell not now all the circumstance.
Yet at the last the statue of Venus shook
And gave a sign, from which event he took
Heart that his prayer accepted was that day.
For though the sign revealed some delay,
Yet well he knew that granted was his boon,
And with glad heart he went him home full soon.
  In the third hour after Palamon
To Venus' temple had upped and gone,
Up rose the sun, and up rose Emily,
Off to the temple of Diana she.
The maidens that she thither with her led,
Were all prepared for fires to be fed,
Took incense, hangings, and the rest, all
That to sacrificial rites may fall,
Horns full of mead, as was the custom wise;
They lacked naught to make their sacrifice,

The temple incense-filled, the hangings fair.
Then Emily with heart tender as air,
Her body washed with water from the well,
How she performed her rite I dare not tell,
Unless it were but to speak in general –
Yet it would be a pleasure to hear all!
If a man means well who then should care;
Rather it is good to wander everywhere.
Her bright hair was combed, un-plaited all;
Of Turkey-oak a green coronal
Upon her head was placed, fair and fit.
Two fires on the altar-hearth she set,
And made her rite, as men are told
By Statius, of Thebes, and books of old.
When kindled was the fire, with piteous face,
To Diana, as you may hear, she spake:
'O chaste goddess of the woods green,
By whom heaven and sea and earth are seen,
Queen of the realm of Pluto dark below,
Goddess of maidens, who my heart does know
And has many a year, all that I desire,
Keep me from your vengeance and your ire,
That Actaeon paid for cruelly!
Chaste goddess, well you know of me
That I wish to live a maid all my life,
Never will I be lover fond, or wife.
I am, you know, still of your company,
A maid, and love hunting and archery,
And to wander in the woodland wild,
Not to be made a wife and be with child.
Nor would I know the company of man.
Now help me lady, since you may and can,
By those three forms of you that in you be,
And Palamon, who has such love of me,
And Arcita too, who loves me sore.
This grace I pray you, and no more:
Send love and peace betwixt those two,

And turn their hearts away from me so,
That all their hot love and their desire,
And all their busy torment and their fire
Be quenched, or turned towards another face.
And if so be you will not grant me grace,
Or if my destiny be shaped, and you,
Rule I must yet have one of the two,
Then send me him that most desires me.
Behold, goddess of sacred chastity,
The bitter tears that down my cheeks fall!
Since you are maid and leader of us all,
My maidenhood protect and well conserve
And while I live, as maid I will you serve.'
The fires burned upon the altar clear
While Emily was thus in prayer,
But suddenly she saw a strange sight.
For all at once one of the fires died,
And quickened again, and then anon
The other fire quenched and was gone.
And as it died it made a whistling
As green brands do in their burning,
And at the brand's end out ran anon
As it were bloody drops, many a one.
Seeing this Emily was so terrified
That she, well nigh mad, began to cry;
For she knew not what it signified,
But only out of fear had she cried,
And wept so it was pitiful to hear.
And at this point Diana did appear,
With bow in hand, dressed as a huntress,
And said: 'Daughter, put away your sadness!
Among the gods on high it is affirmed,
And by eternal writ it is confirmed,
You shall be wedded to one of those
That suffer for you such pain and woe;
But unto which of them I may not tell.
I can remain no longer, fare you well.

The fires that on my altar dance
Shall declare to you, ere you go hence,
The outcome of your love, in this case.'
And with these words, the arrows in their case
The goddess wore rattled, quivering,
And off she went, swiftly vanishing,
At which our Emily astounded was,
And said: 'What means all this, alas?
I place myself under your protection
Diana, and I yield to your direction.'
And home she went anon the nearest way.
This the conclusion: and no more to say.
The next hour of Mars following this,
Arcita to the temple paid a visit,
To fiery Mars, to make his sacrifice,
With all the rites meet to pagan eyes.
With devout heart and true devotion,
To Mars himself he made this orison:
'O mighty god, that in the regions cold
Of Thrace honoured are, and lordship hold,
And have in every kingdom, every land
Of weapons all control in your hand,
And as you wish their fates devise –
Accept from me this pious sacrifice.
If it be victory my youth deserve,
And if my strength be worthy to serve
Your godhead, and I be one of thine,
Then I pray you, pity this pain of mine,
For this suffering and this hot fire
In which you once burned with desire,
When you once enjoyed the beauty
Of fair young Venus fresh and free,
And took her in your arms at will –
Though once upon a time it brought you ill,
When Vulcan caught you in his snare
And found you lying with his wife there,
By all the sorrow that was in your heart,

Have pity now on my pain and smart.
I am young, untutored as you know
And I am afflicted more, I vow,
Than ever was any living creature;
For she who makes me all this woe endure
Cares not whether I sink or swim.
And well I know, before her love I win,
I must gain her by strength in this place;
And well I know, without help or grace
Of yours my strength nothing will avail.
Then help me, lord, let my arm not fail,
Because of the fire that once burnt thee,
As fiercely as this fire that now burns me,
And let me tomorrow win the victory.
Mine let the effort be, and yours the glory!
Your sovereign temple will I honour
Above all places, and evermore labour
In your might arts, and at your pleasure.
And in your temple I will hang my banner,
And all the emblems of my company;
And till the day I die, continually
Eternal fire before you I will mind.
And to this also my word I bind:
My beard, my hair that hangs all a-down
That never yet the touch has known
Of razor or of shears, to you I'll give,
And be your true servant while I live.
Now, lord, have pity on my sorrows sore;
Give me the victory! I ask no more!'
The prayer ceased of Arcita the strong.
The rings on the temple door ere long,
And then the doors, rattled too at last,
At all of which Arcita stood aghast.
The fires burned on the altar bright,
So that all the temple they did light.
A sweet smell rose from the ground,
And Arcita quickly raised his hand,

And into the fire more incense cast,
With other rites too; and at the last
The statue of Mars' mail-coat did ring,
And with that sound he heard a murmuring
Faint and low, that whispered: 'Victory'!'
– For which he gave Mars honour and glory.
And so with joy, and hoping to do well,
Arcita's to his lodgings, as I tell,
As glad as is a bird for the bright sun.
Immediately such strife was begun
Over this granting of his prayer, above,
Between Venus, the Goddess of Love,
And Mars so sternly armed for a fight,
That Jove was busied setting it aright,
Till pale Saturn their father cold,
Who knew so many trials of old,
Searched the past, applied his artistry
So that he swiftly pleased either party;
As it is said 'Age has the advantage.'
In age is wisdom and ancient usage;
Men may the old out-run but not out-wit.
Saturn soon, to quell the strife a bit,
Although it is against his nature mind,
For all this strife sought remedy to find.
'My dear daughter Venus,' quoth Saturn,
'My orbit, that makes so wide a turn,
Has more power than is known to man.
Mine is the drenching in the sea so wan;
Mine is the dark cell deep as is the moat;
Mine the strangling, hanging by the throat,
The murmurings, and the serfs rebelling,
The muttering, and secret poisoning.
I do vengeance and exact correction
While I am in the sign of the Lion.
Mine is the ruin of the lofty hall,
The falling of the tower and the wall
Upon the miner or the carpenter.

I slew Samson when he shook the pillar,
And mine are those maladies cold,
Dark treason and plotting from of old;
My aspect is the father of pestilence.
Now weep no more; by my diligence
This Palamon, who is your own knight,
Shall have his lady as you swore he might.
Though Mars shall help his knight, nonetheless
Betwixt you two there must in time be peace,
Though you be not of one disposition;
Which causes every day this division.
I am your grandfather, ready to do your will.
Weep now no more; I will your wish fulfil.'
  Now will I cease to speak of gods above,
Of Mars, and Venus, Goddess of Love,
And tell you as plainly as I can
The grand result, for which I first began.

PART FOUR

reat was the feast in Athens on that day;
And then the lively season of May
Put everyone in such good countenance
They all that Monday joust and dance,
Spend it in service fit for Venus' eyes.
And because they needed all to arise
At an early hour to view the great fight,
Unto their rest they went that night.
And in the dawn, when day began to spring,
Of horse and harness noise and rattling
There was in all the hostelries around.
And to the palace rode there, with the sound,
Hosts of lords, mounted on steeds and palfreys.
There you might see workmanship of harness,
So strange and rich, and wrought with zeal
Of goldsmith's art, embroidery and steel;
The shields bright, the casques and trappings,
Golden helms, mail, surcoats and trimmings,
Lords in fine clothing on their coursers,
Knights of the retinue, and also squires,
Nailing of spears, and helmet-buckling,
Strapping of shields, and thong-fastening.
Where work was needed, no man was idle.
The foaming steeds at golden bridle
Gnawing, and armourers swift also
With file and hammer pricking to and fro.
Yeomen on foot, commoners in a throng,
With short staves, all crowding there along;
Pipes, trumpets, kettle-drums, clarions,
That in the battle blow warlike songs;

The palace full of people up and down,
Here three, there ten, throwing it around,
The matter of these Theban knights two.
Some said thus, and some it shall be so;
Some agreed with him of the black beard,
Some with the bald, some the shaggy haired,
Some said *he* looked grim, and *he* would fight;
He has an axe that's twenty pounds in weight.
Thus was the hall filled with speculating,
Long after the sun had begun to spring.
  The great Theseus, from sleep awaking
With the minstrelsy and noise they were making,
Was yet in the chamber of his palace rich,
Till the Theban knights, honoured each
The same, were into the palace led.
Duke Theseus was at a window set,
Arrayed as a god seated on a throne.
The people pressed thither and right soon
To see him, and do him high reverence,
And then to hear both his command and sentence.
  A herald on a scaffold shouted: 'Ho!'
Till all the noise of people died below;
And when he saw the people were all still,
Thus he proclaimed the great Duke's will:
'Our lord the Duke has, in his discretion,
Decided that it would be mere destruction
Of noble blood to fight in the guise
Of mortal battle now in this assize.
Wherefore to guarantee that none shall die,
He will his former purpose modify.
No man, therefore, on pain of his life,
No kind of missile, pole-axe or short knife,
Shall to the lists send or thither bring,
No short sword, with point for biting,
Shall any man draw, or bear at his side.
Nor shall a man with his opponent ride
More than one course with sharp ground spear;

But fence, if he wish, on foot himself to spare.
And he that is defeated they shall take,
Not slain, but brought to the upright stake
That shall be set up by either side.
And taken there by force, shall there abide.
And if it so befalls the leader is taken
On either side, or his opponent's slain,
No longer then shall the tourney last.
God speed you; go forth, lay on fast.
With long sword and maces fight your fill!
Go your ways now; this is your lord's will.'
  The voices of the people rose to heaven,
So loud they shouted with glad cries: 'Amen,
God save a lord such as this, so good
He wills no destruction of noble blood!'
  Up rise the trumpets and the melody,
And to the lists ride the company,
By command through the city large,
Hung with cloth of gold and no coarse serge,
Full like a lord this noble Duke does ride,
The two Thebans on his either side,
And after ride the Queen and Emily,
And after that another company
Of all and sundry, according to degree,
And thus they passed through the city,
And at the lists they arrived in time –
It was not of the day yet fully prime.
  When Theseus had taken his high seat,
With Hippolyta the Queen, and Emily,
And other ladies in their ranks around,
Towards the seats pressed the crowd,
And westward through the gates under Mars,
Arcita and his hundred men of war,
With banner red has entered at once,
And at the selfsame moment Palamon
Beneath Venus eastward, to that place,
With banner white and bold of face.

In all the world of seeking up and down
So even a contest could ne'er be found,
Never such a pair of companies;
For there was none so wise that could see
That either of the other had advantage,
In worthiness, nor in rank, nor age;
So evenly were they matched, all guessed.
And in two fair ranks they began to mass.
When their names had been called everyone,
To show that in their number guile was none,
Then were the gates shut, and the cry was loud:
'Do your duty now, young knights so proud!'
  The heralds left their pricking up and down;
Now trumpets ring out and the clarion.
There is no more to say, but east and west
In go the spears firmly to their rests;
In go the sharp spurs to the horses' side.
There men see who can joust and who can ride;
There shafts shiver on the shields thick;
One through his midriff feels the prick.
Up spring the spears twenty feet on high;
Out sweep the swords, as silver bright.
The helms they hew to pieces, cut to shreds;
Out bursts the blood in stern streams red.
With mighty maces the bones they smash;
One through the thickest of the throng has passed.
There the strong steeds stumble, down go all;
One rolls underfoot just like a ball;
One with a broken spear-shaft pounds,
Another hurtles with his mount to ground.
One through the body is hurt, him they take,
Despite his struggles, drag him to the stake;
As was agreed, and there he must abide.
Another is laid there on the other side.
And sometimes Theseus decrees a rest
To drink if they wish, and be refreshed.
  Often this day have those Thebans two

Met together, and hurt their enemy too;
Each of the twain has unhorsed the other.
No tiger in the vale of Gargaphia,
When her whelp is stolen, when it's little,
As Arcita on the hunt could be as cruel,
Through jealousy at heart, to Palamon;
Nor in Morocco is so fell a lion,
That hunted is, by hunger driven mad,
Nor of his prey desirous of the blood
As Palamon to slay Arcita now, his foe.
On their helmets bite the jealous strokes;
Out runs the blood, both their sides bleed.
  Sometime an end there is of every deed;
For ere the sun had gone unto his rest,
The strong King Emetrius did arrest
Palamon as with Arcita he did fight,
And made his sword deep in his flesh to bite,
And twenty men with all their strength take
Him without surrendering, to the stake.
And riding to rescue our Palamon
Strong King Lycurgus is brought down,
And King Emetrius for all his strength,
Is hurled from his saddle a full sword's length,
So fiercely did Palamon his last stroke make.
But all for naught; he was dragged to the stake.
His bold heart could help him not;
He must abide, now that he was caught,
By force, and by their rules of competition.
  Who sorrows now but woeful Palamon,
Who can no more go in again and fight?
And when Theseus had seen this sight,
Unto the folk that fought every one
He cried: 'Ho! No more, for it is done!
I will be true judge, no partisan
Theban Arcita shall have his Emily,
Whom, by his fate, he has fairly won.'
With that the crowd's rejoicing began

So loud and tumultuous withall
It seemed the very lists would fall.
  What can fair Venus do now, above?
What can she say? What does the Queen of Love
But weep there, frustrated of her will,
Till that her tears onto the lists down fell.
She said then: 'I am ashamed, indeed.'
  Saturn said: 'Daughter, hold your peace!
Mars has his way; his knight has all his boon.
But, by my head, you shall be solaced soon.'
  The trumpeters with their loud minstrelsy,
The heralds that yell and cry as loudly,
Overflowed with joy for Sir Arcita.
But hearken to me, quench the noise a little,
At the miracle that there befell anon.
  This fierce Arcita, helm no longer on,
Riding his courser, to show his face,
Canters the whole length of the place,
Looking upward towards Emily;
And she to him shows an eye most friendly
(For women, to speak generally, will soon
Follow behind the favours of Fortune),
And she roused all the joy in his heart.
  Out of the ground an infernal fury starts,
Sent from Pluto at request of Saturn;
From which his horse in fear tried to turn,
Leapt aside, but foundered as he leapt,
And before Arcita could protect
Himself, he pitched down on his head,
And lay there on the ground as he were dead,
His breast-bone shattered by the saddle-bow.
As black he lay as any coal or crow,
The blood had so mounted to his face.
Swiftly he was carried from the place,
Sorrowfully, to Theseus' palace.
There he was separated from his harness,
And carried to a bed, with care thy strive,

For he is yet in memory and alive,
And ever crying out for Emily.
  Duke Theseus with all his company,
Came slowly home to Athens his city,
With full display and great solemnity,
Despite this mishap that had chanced to fall,
He wished not to dishearten them all.
And men said that Arcita should not die;
He would be healed of injury by and by.
And in another thing they joyed again:
That of them all no man had been slain,
Though some were sorely hurt, and one
Above all, pierced through the breast-bone.
Then for other wounds, and broken arms,
Some had salves, and some had charms;
Purgatives and herbs steeped to the brim
They drink, as they hope to save a limb.
Thus the noble Duke as best he can
Comforts and so honours every man,
And then makes revel all the long night
For the foreign princes as was their right.
Of defeat there was scarcely a feeling,
Except as befits a tourney's fighting.
For indeed they felt no discontent
As falling there was merely accident;
And then to be led by force to the stake,
Unyielding, by twenty knights that take
One person alone, and no more, though
Harried forth by arm, and foot, and toe,
And their steed too driven off with staves,
By footmen, both yeomen and their knaves –
Still was not counted a disgrace we see;
No man there could call it cowardly.
Therefore anon Duke Theseus decreed
To stifle all the rancour and jealousy,
The victory to one side *and* the other,
And either side as like as any brother.

And gave them gifts, according to degree,
And held a feast for fully days three,
And conveyed the kings worthily
Out of his town, some way on their journey.
And every man went home the nearest way;
There was no cry but: 'Farewell, and good day!'
With this battle I shall now have done,
But speak of Arcita and Palamon.
  Arcita's breast swells, and the sore
Increases at his heart more and more.
The clotted blood, despite all leech-craft,
Corrupts and festers in his blood, so that
Neither the blood-letting nor the drinking,
Of herbs are any help, nor the cupping.
The 'expulsive virtue', dubbed 'animal',
From the virtue that is known as 'natural'
Cannot void the venom or it expel.
The fibres of his lungs begin to swell,
And every muscle of his breast down
Is wasted by venom and corruption.
He cannot profit, striving to live,
From upward vomiting, downward laxative.
All of him is shattered in that region;
Nature there now has no dominion.
And certainly, where Nature will not work,
Farwell Physic! Go bear the man to church!
This is the sum of all: Arcita must die.
So he sent for Emily by and by,
And Palamon that was his cousin dear.
Then said he thus, as you shall now hear:
  'The woeful spirit, may not, within my heart
Show one iota of my sorrowful smart
To you, my lady, whom I love the most.
But I bequeath you service of my ghost
To you beyond every other creature
Since my life may no longer linger.
Alas the woe! Alas, the pains so strong

That I for you have suffered, and so long!
Alas, for death! Alas, my Emily!
Alas, the parting of our company!
Alas, my heart's queen! Alas, my wife,
My heart's lady, ender of my life!
What is this world? What can a man save?
Now with his love, now in his cold grave,
Lying alone, with none for company.
Farewell, my sweet foe, my Emily!
And soft take me in your arms, I pray,
For love of God, and hark to what I say.
  I have to my cousin Palamon
Shown strife and rancour, many a day gone,
For love of you, and out of jealousy.
Yet Jupiter, so wise, my soul give leave
To speak of *him*, your servant, properly,
In every dimension, full and truly –
That is to say, truth, honour, knighthood,
Wisdom, humility, and noble kindred,
Generosity and all that is of that art –
So may Jupiter take my soul's part,
For in this world right now know I none
So worthy to be loved as Palamon,
Who serves you, and will do all his life.
And if that ever you shall be a wife,
Forget not Palamon, the gentle man.'
With these words his speech to fail began,
For from his feet up to his breast was come,
The cold of death, that had him overcome.
And further yet, for in his arms two
The vital strength is lost and gone also.
Only the intellect, and nothing more,
That dwelt in his heart, sick and sore,
Was left to fail when the heart felt death.
His two eyes dimmed, and failed his breath,
But on his lady gazed while eye could see;
His last word was: 'Mercy, Emily!'

His spirit changed house, and vanished there,
Where I have not been, so cannot say where.
Therefore I pause; I am no minister.
Of souls I find none in this register,
Nor any speculations would I tell
Of them, though some write where they dwell.
Arcita is cold; may Mars his soul receive!
Now will I speak concerning Emily.
  Emily shrieked, and howled Palamon,
And Theseus took his sister up anon,
And bore her swooning from the corpse away.
What help is there in wasting all the day
Telling how she wept both eve and morrow?
For in such cases women feel such sorrow,
When their husband from them shall go,
That for the most part they sorrow so,
Or else fall into such a malady,
That at the last they die, the more surely.
  Infinite are the sorrows and the tears
Of the old folk, and folk of tender years,
Through the town, mourning for the Theban.
For him there weeps both child and man.
There was not such weeping, for certain
When Hector was brought newly slain
To Troy. Alas the pity that was there! –
Rending of cheeks, and tearing of hair.
'Why did you have to die?' the women weep,
'Owning gold enough, and your Emily?'
  No man could bring cheer to Theseus,
Save for his old father Aegeus,
Who knew this world's transmutations,
For up and down, had he seen alteration,
Joy after woe, and woe after gladness;
And gave him an example and a likeness.
  'Just as there never died man,' quoth he,
'That had not life on earth, in his degree,
Just so there never lived a man,' he said,

'In all this world that will not come to death.
This world is but a thoroughfare of woe,
And we are pilgrims passing to and fro.
Death is an end of every worldly sore,'
And after this he said a great deal more
To this effect, full wisely to exhort
The people, that they might find comfort.
  Duke Theseus, with all his busy care,
Cast about now where the sepulchre
Of good Arcita might best sited be,
Most honourable too, in its degree.
And at the last came to the conclusion
That since at first Arcita and Palamon
Had for love made battle there between
Each other, in the same grove sweet and green,
Where he had known his amorous desires,
His lament for love, his own hot fires,
He would make a fire in which the office
Of funeral rites he might there accomplish.
And gave at once commands to hack and hew
The ancient oaks and lay them in a row,
In pyres so arranged that they would burn.
His officers with swift foot soon return
Having executed his commandment.
And after this Theseus has sent
A bier after, and all overspread,
With cloth of gold, the richest to be had.
And clad Arcita in a similar wise;
Upon his hands he had gloves white,
Then on his head a crown of laurel green
And in his hand a sword full bright and keen.
He laid him, bare of face, upon the bier;
At that his cries were pitiful to hear.
And that the people might see him, all,
When it was day he brought him to the hall,
That echoed with the crying and the sound.
  Then came the woeful Theban Palamon,

With fluttering beard and ragged ashy hair,
In clothes black all stained with tears,
And, weeping beyond others, Emily,
The saddest there of all the company.
Inasmuch as the service ought to be
The nobler and the richer in degree
Duke Theseus ordered them to bring
Three steeds trapped in steel all glittering,
And covered with the arms of Sir Arcita.
Upon these steeds, tall and white they were,
Folk were mounted, one man bore his shield,
Another his spear in his hands out-held;
The third he bore his bow, which was Turkish –
Of burnished gold the quiver and the harness –
And pacing slowly sorrowful they appeared,
Riding towards the grove, as you shall hear.
The noblest of the Greeks that were there
On their shoulders carried the bier,
With eyes red and wet, and slow their feet,
Through the city down the central street,
All spread with black and wondrous on high
With the same cloth blackened is the sky.
Upon the right hand went old Aegeus,
And on the other side Duke Theseus,
With vessels in their hands of gold full fine,
All full of honey, milk, and blood and wine;
And Palamon with his great company,
And after that came sorrowing Emily,
With fire in hand, as was then the practice,
To do the office of the funeral service.
  Great labour and infinite preparing
Was at the service and the pyre-making,
That with its green top reached heavenward,
And its sides were twenty fathoms broad –
That is to say, the boughs stretched so wide.
With many a load of straw laid first beside –
But how the fire was built on a height,

Nor the names of all the trees alight –
Oak, fir, aspen, birch, linden, holm, and poplar,
Willow, elm, plane, ash, box, chestnut, laurel, alder,
Maple, thorn, beech, yew, hazel, cornel-tree,
How they were felled – will not be told by me;
Nor how up and down their divinities run,
All disinherited of their habitation,
In which they once dwelt in rest and peace –
The nymphs, and fawns, and hamadryades –
Nor how the creatures and the birds all
Fled in fright when trees began to fall;
Nor how the ground was fearful of the light,
That never used to know the sun so bright;
Nor how the fire was first laid with straw
And then dry sticks, cut three-ways with a saw,
And then with green wood and spiced leaf,
And then with cloth of gold and jewellery,
And garlands hanging, full of many a flower,
Myrrh and incense, with their great savour;
Nor how Arcita lay amongst all this;
Nor what richness about his body is;
Nor how Emily, as was the practice,
Thrust in the fire due the funeral service;
Nor how she swooned when men fed the fire;
Nor what she said, nor what was her desire,
Nor what jewels in the fire men cast,
When the fire was high and burning fast;
Nor how some cast their shields, some their spears,
Onto the pyre and the robes they wear,
And cups full of milk and wine and blood
To fan the flames, a maddened fiery flood;
Nor how the Greeks in a vast rout
Thrice rode round the fire, all about,
Widdershins, and all loudly shouting,
And thrice with their spears clattering,
And thrice how the ladies cry and weep,
And how homeward was lead our Emily;

Nor how Arcita is burnt to ashes cold;
Nor how the lyke-wake was held, all told,
Throughout the night; nor how the Greeks play
At funeral games, nor do I choose to say –
Who wrestled best, naked with oil anointed,
Nor who bore him best, was best appointed;
I will not tell how they all wandered home
To Athens when the funeral games were done,
But briefly to the point I will wend,
And make of my long tale an end.
By degrees, and some length of years,
All finished were the mourning and the tears
Of Greeks, by the general consent.
Then it seems they held a parliament
At Athens, on certain points and matters,
Among which points suggested was
Forging with certain countries an alliance,
Exacting the Thebans' full compliance.
For which this noble Theseus anon
Ordered them to send for Palamon,
He not knowing what the cause or why.
Yet in his black clothes with mournful eye
He came in haste, and right obediently,
And then Theseus sent for Emily.
When they were seated, hushed all the place,
And Theseus had waited for a space
Ere any word came from his wise breast,
His eyes resting whereabouts they wished,
With a sad visage he sighed till all were still
And after that, right thus he spoke his will:
'The First Mover of all cause above
When he first made the fair chain of love,
Great was the effect, noble his intent.
He knew well what he did, and what he meant.
For with that chain of fairest love he bound
The fire, the air, the water and the land,
In certain boundaries that they not flee.

That same prince and Mover,' quoth he,
'Established in this world, a wretched one,
A certain length of days and a duration
To all that is engendered in this place,
Beyond the which days they might not pace,
Although they may well those days abridge.
There is no need authorities to enlist,
For it is proven by experience,
Unless I need to clarify the sense
So men may by this order well discern,
That the Mover is established and eterne.
And each man knows, unless he is a fool,
That every part derives from this whole;
For nature cannot take its beginning
From some part or fragment of a thing,
But from what is perfect and is stable,
Descending so, until corruptible.
And therefore, of his wise providence,
He has so well proclaimed his intent,
That species of things and their progression
Shall only endure by succession
And not eternally, I tell no lies,
As you may comprehend with your eyes.
  Behold, the oak that has long nourishing,
From the day it first begins to spring,
And has so long a life, as we may see,
Yet at the last wasted is the tree.
  Consider too how the hardest stone,
Under our feet on which we ride and go,
Yet wastes as it lies beside the way.
The broad river sometime falls away;
The great towns we see wane and wend.
So you may see that all this thing has end.
  Of man and woman see we well also
That of necessity in one of these terms two –
That is to say, in youth or else in age –
Die they must, the king as shall the page.

Some in their beds, some in the deep sea,
Some on the battlefield as you may see.
There is no help – all goes the same way.
So all this thing must die as I say.
  Who orders this but Jupiter the King,
That is the prince and cause of everything,
Turning all things back to their own source
From which they derive, the true resource?
And against this no creature that's alive
Of any kind, can ever hope to strive.
  So is it wisdom, it seems to me,
To make a virtue of necessity,
And make the best of what we did not choose,
And especially of what to all falls due.
And whoso grumbles at it, is a fool,
And is a rebel to him that all does rule.
And certainly, a man has most honour
Who dies in his prime, in the flower,
When he is assured of his good name.
Then has he done his friend and self no shame,
And gladder should a friend be of his death,
When with honour he yielded up his breath,
Than when his name enfeebled is by age,
And all forgotten are his knightly days.
Then is it best, to win a worthy fame,
To die when at the zenith of our name.
  The contrary to all this is wilfulness.
Why do we grudge it? Why this heaviness,
That good Arcita, of chivalry the flower,
Departed in all honour, at his hour,
Out of the foul prison of this life?
Why grudge here, his cousin and his wife,
His welfare who loved them so well?
Can he thank them? God knows, no man shall!
– That both his soul and himself offend,
And yet their happiness cannot extend.
  What can I conclude from this long story,

But after woe advise us to be merry,
And thank Jupiter for all his grace?
And ere that we depart from this place,
I suggest we make of sorrows two
One perfect joy, to last for ever too.
And look now, where most sorrow is herein,
There will I first bring comfort and begin.
  Sister,' quoth he, 'this has my full assent,
With all the agreement of my parliament,
That gentle Palamon, your own true knight,
Who serves you with will, and heart, and might,
And always has, since you first him knew,
You shall take pity on with grace, and you
Shall take him for your husband and your lord.
Give me your hand, for this is our accord;
Let us now see your womanly pity.
He is a king's brother's son, indeed;
And though he were a poor bachelor,
Since he has served you for many a year,
And suffered for you such adversity,
He should be considered, believe me,
For gentle mercy ought to crown the right.'
  Then said he thus to Palamon the knight:
'I think you need but little sermoning
To give your own assent to this thing!
Come near, and take your lady by the hand.'
  Between them was made anon the bond
That we call matrimony or a marriage,
By all of the council and the peerage.
And thus with all joy and melody
Has Palamon wedded his Emily;
And God, that all this wide world has wrought,
Send him his love, who has it dearly bought!
For now is Palamon in all things well,
Living in bliss, riches, and in health.
And Emily loves him so tenderly,
And he serves her so courteously,

That there was never a word between them
Of jealousy, or other vexation.
So ends Palamon and Emily,
And God save all this fair company! Amen.

Here ends the Knight's Tale

THE MILLER'S PROLOGUE

HERE FOLLOW THE WORDS BETWEEN THE HOST AND THE MILLER

hen that the Knight had thus his tale told,
In all our company was nor young nor old
Who did not claim it as a noble story
And worthy to be stored in memory,
Especially the well-born, every one.
Our Host laughed, and swore: 'We go on,
All goes aright; we've unbound the bale!
Let's see now who shall tell another tale,
For truly the game is well begun.
Now you tell, Sir Monk, if you can,
Something to repay the Knight's tale.'
The Miller, that for drunkenness was pale,
So that with effort on his horse he sat,
He would neither doff his hood or hat,
Nor wait for any man, in courtesy,
But in Pilate's voice began, noisily
To swear: 'By arms, and by blood and bones,
I know a noble tale I'll tell at once,
With which I shall requite the Knight's tale!'
Our Host saw that he was drunk with ale,
And said; 'Wait now, Robin, dear brother;
Some fitter man shall tell us first another.
Wait now, and let us work it all seemly.'
'By God's soul,' quoth the Miller, 'not for me!
For I will speak or else go on my way.'
Our Host answered: 'Tell on, as you may!

You are a fool; your wits are overcome.'
'Now hearken,' quoth the Miller, 'all and some!
But first I'll make a protestation
That I am drunk – I know it by my tongue.
And therefore, if that I misspeak or say,
Blame then the ale of Southwark, I pray.
For I will tell a legend from the life,
Both of a carpenter and of his wife,
How that at her a clerk set his cap.'
The Reeve answered, saying: 'Hold your trap!
Have done with lewd drunken harlotry!
It is a sin and also greater folly
To slander any man, or him defame,
And give wives too an evil name.
There is plenty else at which to aim.'
The drunken Miller spoke up again,
And replied: 'My dear brother Oswald,
He who has no wife, he is no cuckold;
But I say not that therefore you are one.
There be good wives and many a one,
And ever a thousand good for every bad;
You know it yourself unless you're mad.
Why are you angry with my tale now?
I have a wife, indeed, as well as thou,
Yet not for the oxen in my plough,
Would I take it upon me for an hour
To believe it of myself that I was one.
I will believe indeed that I am none.
A husband should not be too inquisitive
Of God's affairs, or how his wife live.
If he shares God's abundance entire,
Of the rest he need not then enquire.'
What more can I say, the Miller there
His words for no man would forbear,
But told his churl's tale in his own manner.
And I regret I must repeat it here;
And therefore every gentle soul I pray

Deem it not, for God's sake, that I say
Ought by evil intent, but must rehearse
All their tales, for better or for worse,
Or else be somewhat false to the matter.
Therefore whoever thinks it idle chatter
Turn to another page, and choose a tale,
For you shall find enough, never fail,
Great and small, stories of genteelness,
And morality as well, and holiness.
Blame not me, if you choose amiss.
The Miller is a churl; you all know this.
So was the Reeve also, and others too,
And harlotry they told of, both the two.
Take thought, and hold me free of blame –
Man should not treat in earnest what's a game.

THE MILLER'S TALE

HERE BEGINS THE MILLER'S TALE

nce upon a time there dwelt in Oxford
A rich churl, that took in guests to board,
And for his craft he was a carpenter.
With him there was dwelling a poor scholar
Who had learned the arts, but all his fancy
Was set on studying astrology,
And he could judge certain propositions
By the course of his investigations,
Should men ask of him at certain hours
If there would be drought or else showers,
Or if they should ask what might befall
Of sundry things – I could not tell them all.
This clerk was called courtly Nicholas.
Skilled in secret love affairs, and solace,
And withal was clever and discreet,
And to see was like a maiden meek.
A chamber had he in that hostelry,
Alone, without any company,
Elegantly garnished with herbs sweet;
And he himself as sweet as root may be
Of liquorice, or any zedoary.
His Almagest, and his library,
His astrolabe, belonging to his art,
His counters for arithmetic, laid apart
On shelves that stood at his bed's head;
His cupboard covered with a cloth of red.
And above all a showy psaltery

On which at night he made melody
So sweetly that all the chamber rang;
And *Angelus ad virginem* he sang,
And after that he sang *The King's Note.*
Full often blessed, was his merry throat.
And thus this sweet clerk his time spent,
With what his friends provided, and the rent.
  This carpenter had wedded a new wife,
Whom he loved far more than his life.
Of eighteen years she was of age.
Jealous he was, and kept her in a cage,
For she was young and wild, and he was old,
And thought himself a likely cuckold.
He knew not Cato – his learning was crude –
Who advised a man to wed his similitude.
Men should wed according to their state,
For youth and age, at odds, end in debate.
But since he had fallen in the snare,
He must endure, as we, the weight of care.
  Fair was this young wife, and then withal
Like a weasel's her body, shapely, small.
A belt she wore, one all barred with silk;
An apron too, as white as morning milk,
Upon her hips, full of many a gusset.
White was her smock, embroidery set
Before, behind, on the collar all about,
Of coal-black silk, within and without.
The tapes of her white cap all together
Were of the same cloth as her collar;
Her broad headband of silk, and set full high.
And she had surely a flirtatious eye.
Plucked very fine were her eyebrows two,
And arched and black as any sloe too.
She was much more beautiful to see
That is the early blossoming pear-tree,
And softer than the wool on a wether;
And by her girdle hung a purse of leather,

Tasselled with green and pearled with brass,
In al this world, in seeking of a lass,
There's no man with fancy so intense
Could dream of such a poppet, such a wench.
Full brighter was the shining of her hue
Than in the Mint a noble forged anew.
And for her singing, lively, voiced afar,
Like any swallow flitting through a barn.
Then she could skip and gambol, as I am
Assured, as any kid or calf behind its dam.
Her mouth was sweet as honeyed mead I'd say,
Or a hoard of apples swathed in heath or hay.
Skittish she was, as is a frisky colt,
Tall as a mast, and straight as a bolt.
A brooch she wore upon her low collar,
As broad as is the boss of a buckler.
Her shoes were laced on her legs high.
She was a primrose, lovely to the eye,
For any lord to take into his bed,
Or yet for any good yeoman to wed.
  Now sirs, now, so things came to pass,
That one day this handsome Nicholas
Began with this young wife to fool and play,
While her husband was down Osney way –
As clerks are full of subtlety and tricks.
And covertly he caught her by the sex,
And said: 'Sweetheart, unless I have my will
For secret love of you, then die I will!'
And held her hard by the haunch bones,
And: 'Sweetheart, love me, now,' he moans,
'Or I will die, as God shall me save!'
And she leapt as a colt does, in the way
Of being shod, and turned her head away.
She said: 'I will not kiss you, by my faith!
Why, let be' quoth she, 'let be, Nicholas!
Or I will cry "Now, help" and shout "Alas!"
Remove your hands, by every courtesy!'

Then Nicholas began to cry for mercy,
And spoke so fair, so earnestly did cast,
That she was hooked, and pledged her love at last,
And swore an oath, by Thomas, Saint of Kent,
That she would be at his commandment,
When she could find an opportunity.
'My husband is so filled with jealousy
That unless you're patient, secretive,
Quoth she, 'I know for sure I shall not live.
You must be wholly secret in this house.'
'Nay, give that not a thought,' quoth Nicholas,
'A scholar would have wasted a good while
If he could not a carpenter beguile.'
And so they were agreed and both swore
To wait awhile, as I have said before.
When Nicholas had done so, as I tell,
And patted her about the buttocks well,
He kissed her sweet, and took his psaltery
And played away, and plucked a melody.
Then it befell, that to the parish church,
There to perform Christ's own works,
This good wife went, on a holy day.
Her forehead shone as bright as any day,
So shiny was it when she left her work.
Now there was a parish clerk of that church,
And this clerk's name was Absolon.
Curly was his hair, and as the gold it shone,
And stuck out in a fan wide and broad.
Full straight and even his parting showed;
His face was red, his eyes grey as a goose.
With St Paul's tracery carved in his shoes,
In red hose he dressed elegantly.
He was clothed neatly and properly
Adorned with a light-blue cloth jacket,
Full fair and densely were the laces set.
And over it he wore a fine surplice
As white as the blossom on the spray is.

A merry youth he was, so God me save!
Well knew he how to let blood, clip and shave,
And draw up deeds of land or quittance.
In twenty manners he could trip and dance,
After the true school of Oxford though,
And with his legs leaping to and fro,
And playing songs on a two-stringed fiddle;
Thereto he sometimes sang a high treble,
And he could play as well on a cithern.
In all the town no brew-house nor tavern
He did not visit with his power to solace,
Where any gaily-dressed barmaid was.
But truth to tell, quite squeamish he was
About farting, and in speech fastidious.
  Absolon, who was gallant in his way,
Would bear the censer round on holy days,
Censing the parish wives whom he passed;
And many a fond look on them he cast,
And especially on the carpenter's wife.
To look at her brightened up his life,
She was so trim and sweet and amorous.
I dare well say, if she had been a mouse,
And he a cat, she'd have been leapt upon.
  This parish clerk, this gallant Absolon,
Has in his heart such a love-longing
That from no wife would he take offerings;
For courtesy, he said, he would take none.
  The moon, when it was night, full bright shone,
And Absalon his cithern did take;
For love indeed he thought to wake.
And off he went, lively and amorous,
Till he came to the carpenter's house,
Arriving there a little after cock-crow,
And placed himself by a casement window,
That was let into the carpenter's wall.
He sings in a voice, graceful and small:
'Now dear lady, if your wish it be,

I pray you to have mercy upon me',
In harmony with his music-making.
The carpenter awoke and heard him singing,
And spoke to his wife and said anon,
'What Alison, do you hear Absalon,
Singing thus under our bedroom wall?'
And she answering her husband's call:
'Yes, God knows John, I hear it very well.'
And so it goes; what more must I tell?
From day to day this lively Absalon
So woos her that he is woebegone.
He lay awake all night, and then daily
He combed his curling locks and gaily,
He wooed by go-betweens, and brokerage,
And swore he would be her own true page;
He sang and warbled like a nightingale;
He sent her mead, sweet wine, and spiced ale,
And flat cakes, piping hot from the oven,
And as she lived in town, coins to spend.
For some folk are conquered by riches,
And some by blows, and some by kindness.
Sometimes, to show skill and agility,
He played Herod in the Mysteries.
But what good did it do him, alas?
She so loves the handsome Nicholas
That Absalon might go blow his horn;
For all his labour there was only scorn.
And thus she made Absalon her dupe,
And of all his eager wooing a joke.
True indeed the proverb, and no lie,
That men repeat: 'Ever the sly, nearby,
Makes the distant lover out of favour.'
Though Absalon knew madness or anger,
Because he was further from her sight,
Nicholas nearby stood in his light.
Now do well, you handsome Nicholas!
For Absalon must wail and sing 'alas!'

And so it befell, on a Saturday
The carpenter had gone down to Osney;
And handsome Nicholas and Alison
Both agreed regarding this decision,
That Nicholas shall devise some wile
This jealous foolish husband to beguile.
And if the game turned out alright,
She would sleep in his arms all night;
For this was her desire and his too.
And straight away, without more ado,
This Nicholas wishing not to tarry,
But quietly to his room does carry
Both meat and drink, to last a day
Or two, and told Alison to say,
If her husband asked for Nicholas,
That she had no idea where he was;
That all the day of him she'd had no sight;
She thought he might be ill, so he might,
For he had not answered the maid's call;
Gave no reply, whatever might befall.
This continued all that Saturday,
And Nicholas still in his chamber lay,
And eat and slept, as pleased him best,
Till Sunday, when the sun went to its rest.
The foolish carpenter wondered without fail
About our Nicholas, why he should ail,
And said: 'I fear by Saint Thomas,
That all is not well with Nicholas.
God forbid that he die suddenly!
This world is now so fickle indeed;
I saw a corpse today borne to church
That only Monday last I saw at work.
'Go up,' quoth he to his lad anon,
'Call at the door, or tap it with a spoon.
See how things are, and tell me swiftly.'
The serving-boy climbed up sturdily,
And at the chamber door a while the lad,

Called and knocked, as though he were mad.
'What how! What do you, Master Nicholay?
How can you lie asleep the livelong day?'
– But all for naught; he heard not a word.
A hole he found, down by the skirting-board,
Through which the cat was wont to creep,
And into that hole he gazed full deep,
And at last a glimpse met his sight
Of Nicholas lying gaping there upright,
As if he had caught sight of the new moon.
Down he goes, to tell his master, soon
Of the state in which he found the man.
The carpenter to bless himself began,
And said: 'Help us, Saint Frideswide!
A man little knows what shall betide.
This man has fallen, through astronomy,
Into some madness, or some agony.
I always thought that's how it would be;
Men should know what God meant us to see.
Yes, blessed always is the simple man,
With nothing but his faith to understand!
So fared another clerk's astronomy;
He walked, in the fields, into the starry
Sky to pry, and see what should befall,
Till into the marl-pit he took a fall;
He saw not that! But yet, by Saint Thomas,
I'm truly worried for poor Nicholas.
He shall be scolded for his studying,
If scold I may, by Jesus, Heaven's king!
Get me a stave to work against the floor,
While you, Robin, heave at the door.
He'll wake from his studying, I guess.'
And to the chamber door he gave address.
His lad was a fellow big and strong,
And heaved it off its hinges at once;
Onto the floor the door fell anon.
Nicholas sat there yet, still as stone,

And kept on gaping up into the air.
The carpenter thought him in despair,
And grasped him by the shoulders mightily
And shook him hard, and shouted loudly.
'What, Nicholas, what ho! What, look down!
Awake, and think you of Christ's passion!
I guard you with the cross from elf and sprite.'
– With that the night-spell he said outright
On all the four sides of the house about,
And on the threshold of the door without.
'Jesus Christ, and Saint Benedict,
Guard this house from all things wicked,
All night through, white *Pater noster*!
Where went thou, Saint Peter's sister?'
  And at last our handsome Nicholas
Began to sigh deeply, and said: 'Alas!
Shall the world be lost and doomed now?
The carpenter replied: 'What say thou?
What, think on God, as we do, working men!'
And Nicholas answered: 'Fetch me drink then,
And afterwards I'll speak, in privacy,
Of certain things regarding you and me;
I will tell them to no other man, that's certain.'
  The carpenter went down, and back again
Brought of powerful ale a large quart.
And when each of them had drunk his part,
Nicholas went swift to his door and shut it,
And made the carpenter beside him sit,
And said: 'John, my good host and dear,
You shall upon your oath swear me here
That to no man this secret you'll betray;
For it is Christ's counsel that I say,
And if you tell it man, you are no more,
For this vengeance fall on you therefore,
You will be mad, let that be understood'
'Nay, Christ forbid it, for his holy blood!'
Quoth then this foolish man: 'I'll not blab,

No, though it's I who say it, I never gab.
Say what you will: I shall never tell
Child nor wife, by him that harrowed Hell!'
'Now John,' quoth Nicholas, 'No lies from me;
I have found through my astrology,
As I gazed into the moon so bright,
That Monday next, a fourth part of the night,
A rain shall fall, as wild, as mad, as could
That half so great was never Noah's flood.
This world,' said he, 'in less than an hour
Shall all be drowned, so hideous the shower.
Thus shall all mortals drown and lose their life'
The carpenter replied: 'Alas, my wife!
And shall she drown? Alas, my Alison!'
For sorrow of this he almost fell, anon
He said: 'Is there no remedy in this pass?'
'Why yes, by God!' quoth handsome Nicholas.
– If you will act on wise advice indeed.
You mustn't follow where your own thoughts lead;
For thus says Solomon, who speaks the truth:
'Act on advice, and you shall nothing rue.'
And if you will act on good counsel,
I undertake, without a mast or sail,
That I shall save her, and you, and me, for
Have you not heard how saved was Noah,
When that our Lord had warned him before
That all the world with water should be o'er?
'Yes,' quoth the carpenter, 'long long ago.'
'Have you not heard,' quoth Nicholas, 'also
The sorrow of Noah, with his fellowship,
Before he could get his wife to ship?
He'd have preferred, I dare well say, alack,
At that time, rather than his wethers black
That she had had a ship to herself alone!
And therefore know you what must be done?
This demands haste, and of a hasty thing
Men may not preach or ask for tarrying;

Anon and quickly get, and bring us in
A kneading trough, or that for brewing,
One for each of us – but see they're large –
In which we can sail as in a barge,
And have in there victuals sufficient
For a day – and never mind the remnant!
The water shall abate and drain away
About nine in the morning, the next day.
But Robin, must not know of this, your knave,
Nor your maid Jill, her too I cannot save.
Ask not why, for though you ask of me,
I will not tell God's secret as must be.
Let that suffice, and unless you're mad
Accept as great a grace as Noah had.
Your wife I shall save without a doubt.
Go now your ways, and speed hereabout.
And when you have for her, and you and me,
Brought in these kneading-tubs, all three,
Then shall you hang them in the attic high,
That no man may our preparations spy.
And when you thus have done as I have said,
And have placed in them our meat and bread,
And an axe to smite the rope in two also,
When the water comes, we may go
And break a hole up high, in the gable,
On the garden side above the stable,
So we can pass freely on our way,
When the great shower has gone away.
Then shall you swim as merry, I undertake,
As does the white duck following her drake.
Then will I call: 'Now, Alison, Now John!
Be merry for the flood will soon be gone!'
And you will say: 'Hail, Master Nicholay!
Good morrow, I see you well, for it is day.'
And then shall we be lords all our life
Of all the world, as Noah and his wife.
But of one thing I warn you of right:

Be well advised, on that same night
That we take ship, and go on board,
None of must speak or say a word,
Nor call out, nor cry, but fall to prayer,
For it is God's own command clear.
Your wife and you must far apart begin,
So that betwixt you there shall be no sin,
No more in looking than there is in deed.
  This decree is made; go, and God speed!
Tomorrow at night when folk are all asleep,
Into our kneading-tubs shall we creep,
And there we'll sit, abiding God's grace.
Go now your way; I have no more space
To make of this a longer sermoning.
Men say thus: 'Send the wise, say nothing.'
You are so wise I have no need to preach.
Go, save our lives, and do as I beseech!'
  This foolish carpenter goes on his way;
Full often says: 'Alas!' and Well-away!'
And to his wife he told it secretly;
And she already knew as well as he
What this ingenious plan might signify.
But nonetheless she made as if to die,
And said: 'Alas, be on your way anon!
Help us escape, or we be dead each one!
I am your true and very wedded wife;
Go dear spouse, and help to save my life.'
  Lo, what a great thing is emotion!
Men may die of imagination,
So deep the impression it may make.
This foolish carpenter began to quake;
He truly thought that he could see
Noah's flood come surging like the sea
To drown Alison, his honey dear.
He weeps and wails, with sorry fear;
He sighs with sorrowful groan enough;
He goes to fetch a kneading-trough,

And after a tub, and one for brewing;
And secretly he carried them all in,
And hung them from the roof in secrecy.
With his own hands he made ladders three
To climb up by the rungs and so after
Reach the tubs hanging in the rafters,
And victualled them both trough and tub,
With bread and cheese, and good ale in a jug,
Sufficient right enough to last a day.
  But ere he had made all this array,
He sent his lad and the wench also
On business to London for to go.
And on the Monday, as it drew to night,
He shut his door, without a candle bright,
And readied everything as it should be;
And shortly up they climbed all three.
They sat still, some little time it was.
'*Pater noster*, and be mum!' said Nicholas,
And 'mum' said John, and 'mum' quoth Alison.
  The carpenter completed his devotion,
And sat quite still, and said his prayer,
Awaiting rain, and tried if he could hear.
A dead sleep, from all this business,
Fell now on the carpenter (as I guess)
About curfew time, or a little more.
With troubling of his spirit he groaned sore,
And often snored, his head awry was.
Down the ladder steals our Nicholas,
And Alison, full softly down she sped.
Without more words they slip into the bed
Where the carpenter was wont to be;
There was the revel and the melody.
And thus lie Alison and Nicholas
At the affair of mirth and solace,
Till the bell for lauds began to ring,
And the friars in the chancel to sing.
  The parish clerk, the amorous Absolon,

Who for love was always woebegone,
Upon the Monday was down at Osney
To disport and play, in company,
And chanced to ask a fellow cloisterer,
Privately, of John the carpenter.
The fellow drew him outside the church,
And said: 'I know not; he's not been at work
Since Saturday. I think that he went
For timber, where our Abbot had him sent;
For he for timber frequently will go
And stay at the grange a day or so –
Or else he at his house, I would maintain.
Where exactly, I could not be sure again.'
  Now Absalon full jolly was and light
Of heart and thought: 'I'll wake tonight,
For certainly I've not seen him stirring
About his door since day began to spring.
So might I thrive, I shall at cock's crow
Knock all secretly at his window,
That's placed low upon his chamber wall.
And Alison now I will tell of all
My love-longing, and will scarcely miss
At least from her the favour of a kiss.
Some sort of comfort I'll have, by faith.
My mouth has itched all this long day;
That is a sign of kissing at the least.
All night I dreamed that I was at a feast.
Therefore I'll go and sleep an hour say,
And then all night will I wake and play.'
  When the first cock had crowed, anon
Up rose this jolly lover, Absalon,
And gaily dressed to perfection is,
But first chews cardamom and liquorice,
To smell sweet, before he combs his hair.
Under his tongue true-love (Herb Paris) there,
And in that way to be gracious he set out.
He wanders off to the carpenter's house,

And stood there still under the casement window –
Until it touched his breast it was so low –
And soft he coughed with a gentle sound:
'What do you, honeycomb, sweet Alison?
My fair bride, my sweet cinnamon!
Awake, my lover, speak to me, come!
So little you think upon my woe,
That for love I faint wherever I go.
No wonder is it that I faint and sweat;
I pine just as a lamb does for the teat,
Surely, darling, I have such love-longing
That like a turtle-dove is my pining;
I scarcely eat as little as does a maid.'
'Away from the window, Jack fool,' she said.
'So help me God, there's no "come up and kiss me"!
I love another – and unless I mistake me –
A better than you, by Jesus, Absalon.
Go on your way, or I will hurl a stone,
And let me sleep, in the devil's name, away!'
'Alas,' quoth Absalon, 'and well-away,
That true love was ever so ill bestowed!
Then kiss me, if that's the most you owe,
For Jesus love, and for the love of me.'
'Will you go your way with it?' quoth she.
'Yes, darling, certainly,' quoth Absalon.
'Then be ready,' quoth she, 'I come anon.'
And to Nicholas she said: Be still!
Now hush, and you can laugh your fill!'
Then Absalon went down on his knees,
And said: 'I am a lord in every degree,
For after this I hope for more hereafter.
Lover your grace, and sweet bride your favour!'
The window she undoes and that in haste.
'Now do,' quoth she, 'come on, no time to waste,
Lest that our neighbours should you espy.'
Then Absalon first wiped his mouth full dry.
Dark was the night like to pitch or coal,

And at the window out she put her hole,
And Absalon, had better nor worse than this,
That with his mouth her naked arse he kissed
Before he was aware, had savoured it.
Back he started, something was amiss,
For well he knew a woman has no beard.
He felt something rough, and long-haired,
And said: 'Fie, alas, what have I done?'
'Tee-hee!' quoth she, and clapped the window shut,
And Absolon goes off with saddened pace.
'A beard, a beard!' quoth spritely Nicholas,
'By God's body, that went fair and well!'
Now Absolon heard every word himself,
And began his lip in anger to bite,
And to himself he said: 'I'll you requite!'
Who rubs himself, who scrubs at his mouth,
With dust, sand, chippings, straw and cloth
But Absolon, who often cries: 'Alas!
My soul consign to Satan, if I'd have
This town before my vengeance,' quoth he,
'For this humiliation well repaid I'll be.
Alas,' quoth he, 'that I never blenched!'
His hot love was cold and all quenched,
For from the time that her arse he kissed
Love he valued less than a stalk of cress,
For he was healed of his malady.
And love he did defy eternally.
And weeping like a child they look to beat,
At gentle pace he slowly crossed the street,
To a smith, and he called Gervase is,
Who forges on his anvil harnesses;
He sharpens shares and coulters busily.
Absalon knocked on the doors all easily,
And said: Open, Gervase, and quick anon!'
'What, who is that? 'It's me, Absalon.'
'What, Absalon! Christ's blessed tree, I say,
Why up so early? *Benedicite*,

What ails you? Some fine girl, at a glance,
Has brought you out on reconnaissance;
By St Neot, you know well what I mean!'
  But Absalon, he gave never a bean
For all the jesting; silently did stand.
He had a deal more business on hand
Than Gervase knew, and said: 'Friend, so dear,
That hot coulter in the chimney there,
Please lend it me; I've something needs doing,
And full soon to you again it I'll bring.'
Gervase answered: 'Even if it were gold,
Or a bag full of nobles, all untold,
You should have it, as I'm a true smith!
Now, Christ's foe, what would you do with it?'
'Let that, 'quoth Absalon, 'be it as it may;
I'll tell you of it all another day' –
And caught the coulter by the cold steel.
  Softly out the door he began to steal,
And then went off to the carpenter's wall.
First he coughed then he knocked withal
On the window, as loud as he dared
Then Alison answered: 'Who's there,
That knocks so? I warrant it's a thief!'
'Why no' quoth he, 'Not so, by my faith;
I am your Absalon, my sweet darling.
'Of gold, quoth he, 'I've brought you a ring.
My mother gave it me, so God me save.
Full fine it is, and carefully engraved;
This will I give you, if you will me kiss.'
  Now Nicholas had risen for a piss,
And thought he would improve the jape:
He should kiss his arse ere he escape.
And he raised the window hastily,
And put his arse outside covertly,
Beyond the buttock, to the haunch-bone.
And then spoke up the clerk, Absalon:
'Speak, sweet bird; I know not where you art.'

Then Nicholas at once let fly a fart,
As great as if it were a thunder-clap,
The clerk was nearly blinded with the blast;
Yet he was ready with his iron hot,
And Nicholas right in the arse he smote.
Off went the skin a hand's breadth round and some;
The coulter had so burnt him on his bum,
That for the pain he thought he would die.
As if he were mad, he began to cry:
'Help! Water, water, help, for God's heart!'
The carpenter out of his slumber starts,
Hears him cry: 'Water' loud as ever he could,
And thought: 'Alas, now here comes Noah's flood!'
Up he sat at once, no more ado,
And with his axe he smote the cord in two,
And down he went – He had no time to sell
His bread or ale at all, but straight he fell
On to the floor, and there a-swooning was.
Up start our Alison and Nicholas,
And cry 'Help!' and 'Succour!' in the street.
The neighbours, the lesser and the great,
Came running in to gaze at this man,
Who swooning lay, both pale and wan,
For in the fall he broken had his arm.
But he had still to suffer all the harm,
For when he spoke, he was borne down,
By handsome Nicholas and Alison.
They told everyone that he was mad;
Afraid so, in a fantasy he had
Of Noah's flood, that in his deep folly
He had bought him kneading-tubs three,
And had hung them from the roof above,
And had begged them, for God's love,
To sit there in the roof for company.
The folk begin to mock his fantasy;
Up into the roof they gaze and stare;
And turn all his hurt to jest right there.

For whatsoever the carpenter averred
It was for naught; no man his story heard.
And with great oaths he was so put down
He was considered mad throughout the town,
For the clerks all said to one another.
'The man is mad, for sure, my dear brother!'
And everybody laughed at all this strife.
  And thus was had the carpenter's wife,
For all his jealousy and keeping by;
And Absalon has kissed his nether-eye,
And Nicholas is scalded on the bum.
God save us all, and now this tale is done!

Here Ends the Miller's Tale

THE REEVE'S PROLOGUE

hen folk had laughed at this preposterous clash
Twixt Absolon and handsome Nicholas,
Different folk it differently relayed,
But for the most part they laughed for days;
Nor at this tale did I see any grieve
Except perhaps for Oswald the Reeve.
In that carpentry was his own craft,
His heart indeed was left somewhat wrath;
He began to fret, and grumbled for a bit.
'And I,' quoth he, 'could pay you back for it,
With how they threw dust in the miller's eye,
If ribaldry was what I wished to ply!
But I am old; a jest suits not my age.
Green days are done; and straw's my forage.
This white head proclaims my aged years;
My heart is as wasted as my hairs,
Unless I too am like the medlars –
The longer the fruit lasts the worse
It is, till rotten, in the dung and straw.
And we old men, I fear, are similar:
Till we be rotten we cannot be ripe.
We jig about as long as men will pipe;
For our will hangs always by this nail,
To have a hoary head and green tail,
As a leek has; and though our strength is gone,
Our will seeks folly ever and anon.
For though we cannot act as we say;
Yet in our ashes old the fire is raked.
'Four live coals we have, let me advise:
Boasting, anger, greed and telling lies.
These four sparks old age will feel.

Our old limbs to impotence may yield,
But will shall not fail; and that's the truth.
And even I have still a colt's tooth,
However many years ago, now gone
My tap was drawn, life's flow began.
For surely, when I was born, anon
Death drew life's stopper and it ran on;
And ever since then has the tap so run
That almost empty now is the tun,
The stream of life is drops upon the rim.
The foolish tongue may well chime and ring
With idiocies that long ago we saw!
Old, all except for dotage is no more.'
  Our Host, on hearing this sermoning,
Began to speak, as lordly as a king,
Saying: 'What's it amount to, all this wit?
What! Shall we speak all day of holy writ?
The devil makes a Reeve that's fit to preach,
As from a cobbler a mariner, or a leech!
Speak out your tale, and waste no more the time.
Lo, here's Deptford, an hour or so it's nine!
Lo, Greenwich too, a rascal in every inn!
It's high time to tell your tale, so begin.'
  'Now sirs,' quoth this Oswald the Reeve,
I pray you all that none of you may grieve
Though I replied, mocking him just now;
For lawful is it force to force should bow.
The drunken Miller has told us here
Of this beguiling of the carpenter,
Perhaps in scorn because I too am one.
And by your leave I'll him repay anon,
In his own boorish language, no mistake.
And I pray to God his neck might break!
He sees a mote in my eye, or a stalk,
But no beam in his own, for all his talk.'

THE REEVE'S TALE

HERE BEGINS THE REEVE'S TALE

t Trumpington, not far from Cambridge,
There runs a brook, and over that a bridge,
And upon this brook there stands a mill;
And this the truth to you indeed I tell.
A miller was who lived there many a day.
Proud as a peacock, lively in his way,
He could pipe, and fish, mend nets to boot,
And turn cups on a lathe, wrestle and shoot.
At his belt he always wore a long blade,
Sharp-edged as any sword was ever made.
A knife he carried in his pouch and such;
Peril of his life, no man dared him touch.
A Sheffield dagger he had in his hose.
Round was his face and pug-shaped his nose;
As bald as a naked ape was his skull.
He was a market-swaggerer right full.
No man a hand on him dared ever lay,
Without the miller swearing he would pay.
A thief he was, as well, of corn and meal,
And cunning at it, ever a man to steal.
And known he was as Scornful Simkin.
A wife he had, who came of noble kin:
The parson of the town her father was.
He dowered her with many a pan of brass,
That Simkin to his blood allied might be.
She had been fostered in a nunnery.
For Simkin wished for no wife, so he said,

Unless she were a maid and well-bred,
To maintain his yeoman's honour high.
And she was proud, pert as a magpie.
A full fair sight they made, those two;
On holidays before her he would troop,
With his hood's tippet wound round his head,
And she came after in a gown of red,
And Simkin's hose were of the same.
No one called her anything but 'dame';
None so bold that travelled by the way
Who with her dare banter or once play,
Unless he wanted to be slain by Simkin,
With his long knife, his dagger or bodkin.
For jealous folk are dangerous you know –
At least they want their wives to think them so.
And since her origin implied some breach,
As filled with pride as water fills a ditch,
And full of scorn, disdain, her ready sneer.
A lady she thought should stay aloof, and glare,
Given her education and her family,
For she had been well taught in the nunnery.
  A daughter they had between the two
Of twenty years, but none other though,
Save a child that was half a year in age;
In his cradle he lay, and was a proper page.
The wench quite plump and well-grown was,
With pug-shaped nose and eyes grey as glass,
With buttocks broad and breasts round and high;
But right fair was her hair, I will not lie.
The parson of the town, since she was fair,
Intended that she should be the heir
To his property and house and carriage;
And he was worried about her marriage.
His purpose was to wed her nobly
Into some blood of high ancestry,
For Holy Church's goods must be expended
On Holy Church's blood, well-descended.

Therefore he would his holy blood honour,
Though Holy Church he might well devour.
  A fine trade this miller had, without doubt,
In wheat and malt from all the land about.
And especially there was a great college
Men called Solar Hall, and that in Cambridge;
Their wheat and their malt too he ground.
And one fine day the hour came around
The manciple lay sick with malady;
And men thought he would die, surely.
At which the miller stole both meal and corn
And took a hundred times more than before;
For formerly he stole, and yet politely,
While now he thieved outrageously:
Of this the warden made a great affair,
But not a jot the miller did he care;
He blustered, and swore it was not so.
  Now two young students, poor I vow,
Dwelt there in the college hall, and they
Were headstrong and keen to joke and play,
And simply out of mirth and revelry,
They ever begged the warden busily,
To give them leave, to travel out of town,
And, to the mill, to see their corn ground,
And boldly they wagered him their neck,
They would not let the miller steal a peck
Of corn by force or cunning he might weave;
And in the end the warden gave them leave.
John was the one, and Alan was the other;
From the same village, that was Strother,
Far in the north – I cannot tell you where.
  This Alan all his gear did prepare,
And on a horse the sack he threw anon.
Off went Alan the clerk, and also John,
With good sword and buckler by their side.
John knew the way – he required no guide –
And at the mill down the sack he laid.

Alan spoke first: 'All hail, Simon, i'faith!
How fares your fair daughter and your wife?'
'Alan, welcome,' quoth Simkin,' by my life!
And John also; how now, what do you here?'
'By God,' quoth John, 'Necessity's no peer;
He must serve himself that has no servant,
Or else he is a fool, as the scholars rant.
Our manciple, I think will soon be dead,
So painful are the molars in his head.
And I have come, and Alan here, we twain,
To grind our corn, and bear it home again.
I pray you speed us hither if you may.'
'It shall be done,' quoth Simkin, 'by my faith!
What will you do while all that is in hand?'
'By God, right by the hopper shall I stand,'
Quoth John, 'and watch how the corn goes in.
I've never yet seen, by my father's kin,
The hopper when it's wagging to and fro.'
Alan replied: 'John and will you so?'
Then I'll stand beneath, by my crown,
And watch how the meal trickles down
Into the trough; that shall be my sport.
For John, i'faith, I am of your sort;
I am as little a miller as you may be.'
The miller smiled at their simplicity,
And thought, 'All this will only last a while,
They think that nobody can them beguile.
But, by my thrift, I'll hoodwink them, you see,
For all their cunning in philosophy.
The more clever tricks they undertake,
The more will I steal when I take;
Instead of flour yet I'll give them bran.
The greatest scholar's not the wisest man –
As the wolf once said to the mare.
And all their art I count it not a hair!'
Out at the door he goes all secretly,
When he sees his chance, and quietly.

He looks up and down till he has found
The scholars' horse, tied there, around
Behind the mill, in a leafy dell.
And to the horse he goes fair and well;
He strips the bridle off right anon,
And once the horse is loose, he's gone
To the fen, and the wild mares therein
Off with a 'whinny' through thick and thin.
  The miller went back to work; and no word spoke,
Then, toiling, with the clerks he cracked a joke
Till their corn was fair and fully ground.
And when the meal was sacked and bound,
John goes out and finds his horse away,
And starts to cry 'a thief' and 'well-away!'
'Our horse is lost! Alan, for Gods' bones,
Up on your feet! Come on, man, at once!
Alas, our warden of his palfrey's shorn;
Thus Alan all forgot the meal and corn;
All his husbandry fled from his mind.
'What, where is he?' He began to cry.
  The wife came running up, just then
Said: 'Alas, your horse is off to the fen
To the wild mares, as fast as he can go.
A curse be on the hand that bound him so,
And he that better should have tied the rein!'
'Alas,' quoth John, 'Alan, for Christ's pain,
Lay down your sword, and I will mine also.
I am as swift, God knows, as any roe;
By God's heart, he'll not escape us both!
You should have put him in the barn, though.
Curse it, Alan, you're the stupid one!'
  These foolish clerks full fast have run
Toward the fen, both Alan and our John.
And when the miller saw that they were gone,
Half a bushel of their flour he did take,
And bade his wife go knead it in a cake.
He said: 'Whatever it was the clerks feared

Yet can a miller clip a clerk's beard,
For all his cunning; let them go their way!
Look how the horse goes; let the children play!
They'll not catch him quickly, by my crown.'
  Those foolish clerks go running up and down,
With: 'Halt, halt! Stand, stand! Ware, behind!
You go whistle, and I'll stop him, mind!'
But briefly, till the very fall of night
They could not, though they tried all they might,
Catch their horse, he always ran so fast;
Till in a ditch they caught him at the last.
  Weary and wet, as the beast is on the rein,
Come foolish John, and Alan back again.
'Alas,' quoth John, 'the day that I was born!
Now are we fit for mockery and scorn.
Our corn is stolen; men fools will us call,
Both the warden and our fellows all,
And especially the miller, well-away!'
So John moaned as he went on his way
Towards the mill, Bayard's rein in hand.
The miller sitting by the fire he found,
For it was night, too late now for aught;
But for the love of God they him besought
For lodging, and their ease, for a penny.
  The miller answered them: 'If there be any,
Such as it is, you shall have your part.
My house is little, but you have learning, art;
You can by argument create a place
A mile wide from twenty foot of space!
Let us see now if this place may suffice,
Or make more room with speech, if you be wise.'
'Now Simon,' said our John, 'by Saint Cuthbert,
You're ever witty, and that's a fair answer.
I've heard say, men should make of a thing,
Such as they find it, or their own should bring.
But especially I pray you, my host so dear,
Bring us some meat and drink, make some cheer,

And we will pay you truly and in full.
With empty hands men lure no hawks at will;
Lo here's our silver, ready for us to spend.'
  The miller in his turn his daughter sends
For ale and bread, and roasts them a goose,
And ties their horse; it shall no more go loose.
And in his own chamber makes them a bed,
With sheets and woollen blankets fairly spread,
Not ten foot from his own bed, or twelve.
His daughter had a bed all to herself,
In the same chamber, right nearby.
He could do no better, and for why?
There was no other room in the place.
They supped and talked, for a space,
And drank strong ale, the very best;
About midnight went they to their rest.
  Well has this miller filled full his head;
All pale he was with drink, no longer red;
He hiccups and he talks through his nose,
As if he were hoarse or suffers from a cold.
To bed he goes and with him goes his wife;
She was merry as a jay, on my life,
So was her merry whistle well wet.
The cradle at the bed's foot is set,
To rock and to give the child suck.
And when they had drunk all in the crock,
To bed went the daughter right anon.
To bed goes Alan and also John;
Of sleeping-draught they'd drunk a pail.
The miller had so heavily tippled ale
That like a horse he snorts in his sleep;
Nor from his tail behind a note does keep.
His wife sang him the burden, full and strong;
Men might hear her from a full furlong.
The wench snored too, for company.
  Alan the scholar, heard this melody,
Poked at John, and said: 'Sleepest, thou?

Heard thou ever such a song ere now?'
Lo, what a compline sing them all!
A wildfire on their very bodies fall!
Who ever heard such frightful snoring?
Yes, they shall meet the worst of endings!
This long night through I'll find no rest.
Yet no matter; all shall be for the best!
For John,' said he, 'as I may ever thrive,
If I can I'll have that wench alive.
Some compensation law has shown us;
For John, there is a law that says thus:
That if a man in some way be aggrieved,
Then by another he shall be relieved.
Our corn is stolen – none can say nay –
And we have had a right unlucky day;
Yet since there's no rectification
Of my loss, I'll have compensation.
By God's soul, no otherwise shall it be!'
  Then John replied: 'Alan, wary be.
The miller is a dangerous man,' he said,
'If he wakes from sleeping like the dead,
He might do us both a villainy.'
  Alan answered: 'I count him not a flea.'
And up he rose, and to the wench he crept.
The wench lay flat on her back, and slept,
Till he so nigh was, ere she might espy,
That it was far too late for her to cry;
And briefly to explain, they soon made one.
Now play, Alan, for I will speak of John.
  Our John lies still, a minute more or so,
And to himself he speaks words of woe.
'Alas,' quoth he, 'this is a wicked jape!
Now I see that I am made but an ape.
My friend has something yet for his harm:
He has the miller's daughter in his arms.
He took his chance and now his needs are sped,
While I lie like a bag of chaff in bed.

And when the joke is told another day,
I shall be thought a fool and afraid!
I'll rise and chance my arm, by my faith!
"Unmanly is unlucky", so men say.'
And up he rose and silently he went
Up to the cradle, with this same intent,
Of carrying it quietly to his bed's foot.
  Soon after this, the miller's wife was up,
Half-awake, and going for a piss,
On her return the cradle she did miss,
And groping here and there, she found it not.
'Alas,' quoth she, 'I very nearly got
By mistake into the scholar's bed.
Oh, *benedicite*, then had I been misled!'
And off she went till she the cradle found.
Then she groped still further with her hand
And found the bed, and thought it good
Because the cradle beside it stood,
And knowing not, because it was so dark
Fair and well crept in there with the clerk,
And lay quite still, and would have gone to sleep.
In a while John the clerk he made a leap,
And on this good wife he laid on sore.
So good a bout she'd never gone before;
He thrust hard and deep as he were mad,
And a merry time those two students had
Till the third cock began to sing.
  Alan was growing weary towards morning,
For he had laboured on through the dark,
And said: 'Farewell, Molly, my sweetheart!
The day is come; I may no longer bide.
But evermore, wherever I go or ride,
I am your own clerk, may I prosper well!'
'Now, dear lover,' quoth she, 'go, farewell!
But ere you go, one thing I must tell:
As you travel home and pass the mill,
Right at the entrance of the door behind

A cake of half a bushel you will find
That was made from your own meal,
That I helped my father for to steal.
And, good lover, God thee save and keep!'
And with that word she nigh began to weep.
  Alan rose and thought, 'before night's end,
I'll go and creep in beside my friend.'
And found the cradle with his hand anon.
'By God,' thought he, 'I near went wrong!
My head's so dizzy with all this tonight
That I've almost failed to go aright.
By the cradle, my mistake I know,
Here lies the miller and his wife also.'
And off he went, the devil led the way,
To the bed where the sleeping miller lay.
Hoping to creep in with his friend John;
Beside the miller he's crept anon,
Caught him by the neck, and starts to say:
'You John, you swine's-head, come, awake,
For Christ's soul, here's a noble game!
For by that lord that's called Saint James,
Thrice have I in this one short night
Had the miller's daughter bolt upright,
While you, like a coward, lay afraid.'
  'Have you,' quoth the miller, 'false knave?
Oh, false traitor, false clerk,' quoth he,
'I'll see you dead, by God's dignity!
Who dares be so bold as to disparage
My daughter, come of such a lineage?'
And by the throat he caught our Alan,
And Alan in turn grabbed at his man,
And on the nose he smote with him fist.
Down ran the bloody stream upon his breast,
Onto the floor, nose and teeth they broke,
They thrashed about like two pigs in a poke.
And up they went, and down again anon,
Till the miller stumbled on a stone,

And down he fell backward on his wife,
Who knew nothing of this foolish strife,
For she had fallen asleep ere dawning light,
With John the clerk who was awake all night.
And with the miller's fall she woke afraid;
'Help, holy cross of Bromholm!' she said.
'*In manas tuas*! Lord, I call to thee!
Awake, Simon, for the fiend is on me!
My heart is broken; help, I am dead!
There's something on my belly and head.
Help, Simkin, for the false clerks fight!'
Then John starts up as quick as ever he might,
And gropes around the walls to and fro,
To find a stick, and she starts up also,
And knows the place better than does John,
And by the wall a staff she finds anon,
And sees a little shimmering of light,
For at a hole in shone the moon bright;
And by that light she sees both the two,
But foolishly she sees not who was who,
But sees something white with her eye.
And when this white thing she did espy,
Thought it the clerk with a night-cap on,
And gripping the staff she crept upon
What she thought was Alan and hit him full,
But smote the miller on his bald skull
That down he goes, and cries, 'God, I die!'
The clerks beat him well and let him lie,
Got them ready, and took their horse anon,
Their meal as well, and off they were gone,
And passing by the mill, found their cake
Of half a bushel of flour, and well-baked.
So the proud miller they did soundly beat,
And he has lost his grinding of the wheat,
And paid for the supper there as well,
Of Alan and John who wrought as I did tell;
His wife is had, and his daughter else.

Lo, what comes of being a miller false!
And therefore the proverb still proves true:
Don't hope for good if you evil do.
A trickster himself beguiled will be.
And God, that sits in high majesty,
Save all this company, both great and small.
– Now my tale has paid the Miller and all.

Here ends the Reeve's Tale

THE COOK'S PROLOGUE

he London Cook, as the Reeve's tale hatched,
Wriggled as if his back were being scratched.
'Ha, ha, ha!' quoth he, 'for Christ's passion,
The Miller found that a harsh conclusion
To his argument about room-space!
Well said Solomon in his language:
'Don't let everyone inside your house.'
For lodging men by night is dangerous.
Well should a man think carefully
About who shall invade his privacy.
I pray to God, give me sorrow and care,
If, since they named me Roger of Ware,
I ever heard Miller so fooled for a lark,
A malicious trick and done in the dark!
But God forbid that we linger here:
And so, if you will vouchsafe to hear
A tale of mine, though a poor man,
I will tell you, as well as ever I can,
A little jest that befell in our City.'
Our Host replied and said: 'I grant it thee.
Now tell on, Roger, look that it be good!
From many a pasty have you let blood,
And many a Jack of Dover pie have sold,
That has been twice hot and twice cold,
From many a pilgrim have had Christ's curse,
Your parsley gave them a turn for the worse,
That they ate with your stubble-fed goose;
For there's many a fly in your shop loose.
Now tell on, noble Roger, by name!
But I pray, no anger at my jesting game;
A man may speak truth in game and play.'

'You speak truth,' quoth Roger,' by my faith!
But "True jest, poor jest", as the Flemings say.
And so Harry Bailey, by your faith,
Be not angry, before we part from here,
If my tale be that of a hosteller.
However I won't tell it yet, I say,
But before we part, you shall be paid.'
And with that he laughed with loud cheer,
And told his tale, as you now will hear.

THE COOK'S TALE

prentice once there was dwelt in our City,
And of the guild of victuallers was he.
As gaily dressed as goldfinch in a copse;
Brown as a berry, a fine short chap he was,
With locks black, combed so elegantly.
Dance he could so well and friskily
That he was named Perkin Fun-Lover.
And he was as full of love and amour
As is the hive full of honey sweet;
Lucky the wench that with him might meet.
At every bridal day he'd sing and hop.
He loved the tavern better than the shop,
When there was any riding in Cheapside,
Out of the shop and thither he would hie;
Till that he might all the sight there glean
And have a dance as well, he'd not be seen.
And he gathered a company of his sort,
To jig and sing, and make such merry sport.
And there they would arrange to meet
To play at dice in such and such a street;
For was no prentice in the town alive
That could cast a fairer pair of dice
Than Perkin could; and he was ever free
At spending, in a place of privacy.
As his master found in trade affairs;
Since often times he found the till was bare.
For sure where there's a prentice fun-lover
That haunts dice, debauchery or amour,
His master from his shop will pay the fee,
Though he play no part in the minstrelsy.
Theft and debauchery are interchangeable.

As well play all on cithern, as on fiddle,
Among the base, revel and honesty
Are at odds any day, as men may see.
 This jolly prentice with his master good
Stayed till well nigh out of prentice-hood,
Ever was reprimanded soon and late,
And sometimes led revelling to Newgate.
But at last his master him bethought,
On a day when his accounts were wrought,
Of a proverb that speaks this very word:
'Best toss a rotten apple from the hoard
Before it rot all the fruit that's present.'
So goes it with a dissolute servant;
A lot less harm to let him go his ways,
Than ruin all the servants in the place.
Therefore his master gave him quittance,
And bade him go, with a 'good riddance'!
And so the jolly prentice has to leave.
Now let him riot all night, as he please!
And as there's accomplice for every thief,
To help him to lay waste and deceive
Any man he borrowed from or pilfered,
Anon he sent his clothing and his bed
Round to a friend of his own sort,
Who loved dice too and revel and sport,
And had a wife who solely for appearance
Kept a shop, but whored for sustenance.

Here Ends the Cook's Tale (Chaucer left it incomplete)

The Man of Law's Prologue

The words of the Host to the company

Our Host saw well that the bright sun
The arc of his artificial day had run
The fourth part and half an hour and more,
And though he was not deeply versed in lore,
He knew that it was the eighteenth day
Of April, that is messenger to May,
And saw that the shadow of every tree
Was in its length the same in quantity
As was the body erect that produced it,
And therefore, from the shadow, his wit
Deduced that Phoebus, so clear and bright,
Was five and forty degrees in height,
And on that day, and in that latitude,
It was ten o'clock, he might conclude;
And suddenly he turned his horse about.
'Lordings,' quoth he, 'I warn you all right now,
The fourth part of this day's already gone.
Now, for the love of God and of Saint John,
Lose no time, as little as you may.
Lordings, time is wasting, night and day,
And steals from us, what with covert sleeping,
And what with negligence in our waking,
Like the stream that never returns again,
Descending from the mountain to the plain.
Seneca, and many a philosopher,
Mourn for time more than for gold in coffer;
'For loss of wealth recovered it may be,

But loss of time consumes us,' quoth he.
It will not come again, once sped,
No more than will Malkin's maidenhead,
When she has lost it in her wantonness.
Let us not moulder thus in idleness!
  Sir Man of Law' quoth he, 'yours be bliss,
Tell us a tale, as our agreement is.
You have submitted by your free assent,
To accept, in this affair, my judgement.
Acquit yourself now at my request;
Then shall you do your duty, with the best.'
  'Host,' quoth he, '*depardieux*, I assent!
To break a pledge was never my intent.
A promise is a debt, and I would pay
All my debts; I can no fairer say.
For the laws a man makes in his might
He should obey himself, and that is right –
Thus says our text. Nonetheless, for certain,
I can right now no decent tale sustain
Such as Chaucer, though little skilled is he
In metre, and in rhyming craftily,
Has written, in such English as he can,
Of ancient times, known to many a man.
And if he has not told them, dear brother
In one book, he has told them in another.
He has written of lovers up and down
More than our Ovid himself had found
In his *Heroides* that are full old.
Why tell them again, since they are told?
  In youth he spoke of Ceyx and Alcyon,
And after that has written of everyone,
Those noble wives and those lovers too.
Whoever reads his large volume through
That is called *The Legend of Good Women,*
There the large wounds wide are penned
Of Babylon's Thisbe, and Lucretia,
Dido's sword for Aeneas her lover,

The tree of Phyllis for her Demophon,
Deianira's and Hermione's moan
Ariadne's and Hypsipyle's,
The barren isle standing in the sea,
The drowned Leander for his Hero,
The tears of Helen, and then the woe
Of Briseis, and you, Laodamia;
The cruelty of the Queen, Medea –
The little children hanged in the hall,
For your Jason, who in love was false.
O Hypermnestra, Penelope, Alceste,
Your wifehood he commended with the best!
  But certainly no word does he sample
Of the wicked Canace's example,
Who loved her own brother sinfully.
Such cursed stories, they are not for me,
Nor that of Tyre's Apollonius –
And how the cursed King Antiochus
Bereft his daughter of her maidenhead.
And is so terrible, that tale I read,
Where he hurls her to the pavement!
And therefore with deliberate intent,
Would never write in any of his sermons
Of such unnatural abominations,
Nor will I retell them, though I may.
  But what shall I do for a tale today?
I'm loath to be likened, you see,
To Muses men call the Pierides –
The *Metamorphoses* shows what I mean.
But nonetheless I care not a bean,
Though I come after him with poor man's bake.
I'll speak in prose, let him the rhymes make.'
And with a serious expression here
Began his tale, as you shall after hear.

THE PROLOGUE TO THE MAN OF LAW'S TALE

hateful harm, condition of poverty,
With thirst, with cold, with hunger, so confounded!
To ask for help shames your heart wretchedly;
If you ask none, so sore then are you wounded
That very need discovers all your wound hid.
Despite your need, you must for indigence
Steal or beg, or borrow your subsistence.

You blame the Christ, and say full bitterly
He misdirects our riches temporal.
Your neighbour you blame sinfully,
And say you have too little, and he has all.
'By faith,' you say, 'judgement someday will fall,
And his tail shall burn in the fire indeed
For he the needy helped not in their need!'

Hark to the opinion of the wise:
'Better to die than live in indigence.
Your very neighbour will you despise.'
If you be poor, respect for you flies hence!
Yet from the wise man hear this sentence:
'All the days of poor men are wretched.'
Beware then, ere there you make your bed.

If you are poor, your brother hates you too,
And all your friends flee from you, alas!
O rich merchant, full of wealth are you!
O noble, o prudent folk, as is your case!
Your bag's not filled by throwing *double ace*,
But *six and five* that fall to you by chance.
At Christmas-tide merrily may you dance!

You seek o'er land and sea for your winnings.
As wise folk you know the certain state
Of kingdoms; are the fathers of tidings
And tales, both of peace and fierce debate.
I were now of tales right desolate,
But that a merchant, of another year,
Taught me a tale, one that you now shall hear.

The Man of Law's Tale

Here begins the Man of Law's tale

n Syria once there dwelt a company
Of merchants rich, both dignified and true,
That far and wide despatched their spicery,
Their cloth of gold and satins rich of hue,
Merchandise of such quality, brand new,
That every one was happy to trade there
With them, and sell them all their wares.

Now it happened that merchants of this sort
Decided that to Rome their way they'd wend.
Whether for business dealings or for sport,
They wished no other messenger to send,
But go to Rome themselves did so intend.
And in such place as they thought pleasing
For their purpose, settle on their lodging.

The merchants had sojourned in that town
A certain time, as their pleasure chanced.
And so befell that the excellent renown
Of the Emperor's daughter, Dame Constance,
Reported was, with every circumstance,
To these Syrian merchants in such wise,
From day to day, as I shall you advise.

This was the common voice of every man:
'Our Emperor of Rome, God save thee!
A daughter has, that since the world began,
Reckoning both her goodness and her beauty,
There was never such another one as she.
I pray that God in honour keep her green,
And would she were of all Europe the queen!

In her there is high beauty without pride,
Youth, without frivolity or folly;
In all her works virtue is her guide;
Humility has conquered vanity.
She is the mirror of all courtesy;
Her heart the chamber is of holiness,
Her hand, the medium of all largesse.'

And all these words were just, as God is true;
But to our purpose let us turn again.
These merchants their ships had freighted new,
And after they had seen this blessed maid,
Home to Syria they gladly sailed,
And ran their trade as they had done before,
And lived in wealth; I can say no more.

Now it befell these merchants stood in grace
With him that was the Sultan of Syria;
For when they returned from foreign place,
He would, of his benevolence and care,
Make them good cheer so he might share
Tidings of sundry kingdoms, and have word
Of wonders that they might have seen or heard.

Among other things, especially,
The merchants told him of Dame Constance
Her nobleness, in earnest, so minutely,
That thought of her the Sultan did entrance
And kept her image so in his remembrance
That all his delight and care was for
The love of her, while life might endure.

Peradventure, in that immense book
Men call the heavens, it written was
In stars, since upon our birth they look,
That love would be the death of him, alas!
For in the stars, clearer than in glass,
Is written, God knows, for us to read
Each man's death as it must come to be.

In stars many a winter long before
Was written the death of Hector, Achilles,
Of Pompey, Caesar, ere they were born;
The strife of Thebes, and of Hercules,
Of Samson, Turnus, and of Socrates
The death; but men's wits are so dull,
That no man can read of it all in full.

This Sultan for his privy council sent,
And briefly through this matter to pace,
He declared to them his whole intent,
And said, unless he might have the grace
To win Constance within a little space,
He was but a dead man, bade them see
If they could find for him some remedy.

Diverse men diverse words then said;
They discussed it, argued up and down.
Many a subtle reason forth they led;
They spoke of magic and deception.
But finally, resolved in conclusion
That they could see no clear advantage
In any other course, except in marriage.

But therein they saw such difficulty,
Reasoning like this, to make all plain,
Because there was such great diversity
Between their laws, one must maintain
They said 'no Christian prince would deign
Wed his daughter by the laws as set
And taught us by Mahomet, our prophet.'

And he replied: 'Rather than I should lose
Constance, I would be christened, no less.
I must be hers; I may no other choose.
I pray you, these thoughts no more express;
Save my life, and show no idleness
In gaining her who can kill me or cure,
For in this woe I cannot long endure.'

What need for greater explanation?
I say, by treaties and diplomacy,
And also by the Pope's mediation,
And all the Church, and all the chivalry,
Bent on destroying Islam and heresy,
And spreading the law of Christ dear,
They all agreed, such as you shall hear:

How that the Sultan and his baronage
And all his lieges should christened be,
And he should have Constance in marriage,
And certain gold – I know not what quantity;
Be found as sufficient security.
This same accord was sworn on either side.
Now, fair Constance, may God be your guide!

Some might expect me to tell, I guess,
Of all the preparations in advance
That the Emperor, in his nobleness,
Made for his daughter, Dame Constance.
Yet men will know that such an instance
Cannot be described in some little clause,
As was displayed in all that noble cause.

Bishops were appointed to attend,
Lords, ladies, knights of high renown,
And other folk enough – to this end.
And it is notified to all the town
That everyone of true devotion
Should pray to Christ that He this marriage
Might favour in His sight, and speed its passage.

The time is come for her departure –
I say the woeful fatal day is come,
That there she may no longer linger,
And forth to go were ready all and some.
Constance, who was with sorrow overcome,
Full pale arose, and dressed herself to go,
For well she knows it must indeed be so.

Alas, what wonder is it if she wept,
On being sent to a foreign nation,
Far from friends whose company she'd kept,
And then be bound in absolute subjection
To someone, knowing not his predilection?
Husbands are all good men, as known before
By all good wives – I dare say nothing more.

'Father,' she said, 'your wretched child Constance,
Your young daughter used to life so soft,
And you, my mother, of delight the instance
Above all things, except for Christ aloft,
Constance your child commends herself oft
To your grace, for I go to Syria,
And I lose you from my sight forever.

Alas, unto that barbarous nation
I must anon, since it is your will!
But Christ, that died for our redemption,
So give me grace his purpose to fulfil.
I, wretched woman, any can me kill.
Women are born to servitude and penance,
And to be kept within man's governance.'

I think in Troy, when Pyrrhus breached the wall,
And Ilium burnt, or in Thebes the city,
Or Rome, when harm was done by Hannibal,
Who vanquished the Romans times three,
Never were heard such tender tears, for pity,
As were heard in her room at her departing!
But forth she must, whether she weep or sing.

O Primum Mobile, cruel firmament!
That drives all on in your diurnal sway
And hurls all from the east to occident
That naturally would run the other way,
Your driving set the heavens in such array
At the beginning of this fierce miscarriage
That cruel Mars had cursed the marriage.

Unfortunate ascendant tortuous
Whose ruler now helpless falls, alas,
Out of his angle into the darkest house!
O Mars, O fatal chart, as this one was!
O feeble moon, unhappy in your course!
Positioned, where you are not well-received;
From where you would be so, cruelly heaved.

Imprudent Emperor of Rome, alas!
Was there no astrologer in all your town?
Was there no better day than this day was?
In journeying is there no decision
To be made for folk of high condition,
Even when their natal chart we know?
Alas, we are too ignorant or slow!

To ship is brought this woeful fair maid,
Solemnly, with royal circumstance.
'Now Jesus Christ be with you all,' she said.
Them there's no more but: 'Farewell, fair Constance!'
She strives to show a happy countenance;
And forth I let her sail now in this manner,
And turn I will again to my matter.

The Sultan's mother, a well of vices,
Has understood her son's full intent,
How he will forsake old sacrifices,
And right anon she for her council sent,
And they were made aware of her bent.
And when they were all assembled there,
She sat down, and spoke as you shall hear:

'Lords,' quoth she, 'you know, each and every one,
How my son is minded to forget
The holy laws proclaimed in our Koran,
Even by God's messenger Mahomet.
But one vow to great God I make yet:
The life shall rather out of my body start,
Than Mahomet's law from out my heart!

What can befall us from this new law
But thraldom to our bodies and grief,
And afterward to fall into Hell's maw
Renouncing Mahomet, and our belief?
So lords, will you make pledge to me
In what I say, assenting to my course,
And I shall make us safe for evermore?

They swore and assented, every man,
To live and die for her, and by her stand,
And ever, in the best way that he can,
Support her with his friends throughout the land.
And she this enterprise takes in hand
Which you shall hear of as I devise,
And to them all she spoke and in this wise:

'We first shall feign their baptism to take –
Cold water will grieve us but a mite!
And I shall such a feast and revel make
That, I vow, the Sultan I'll requite.
'For, though his wife be christened never so white,
She shall have need to wash away the red,
Though she pour a font of water on her head.'

O Sultaness, root of iniquity,
Virago, Semiramis the second!
O serpent masked in femininity,
Like the serpent who in Hell is bound!
O feigning woman, all that may confound
Virtue and innocence, through your malice,
Is bred in you, the nest of every vice!

O Satan, envious since that day
When you were chased from our heritage,
You know well woman's ancient way!
You made Eve bring us into bondage.
You will foredoom this Christian marriage.
Your instrument – well-away the while! –
You make of woman, whom you will beguile.

This Sultaness, whom I blame and decry,
Let her council go quietly on their way.
Why should I in this tale longer tarry?
She rides to see the Sultan on a day,
And tells him she will renounce her faith,
And baptism at the priest's hands undergone
Repent of being a heathen for so long,

Beseeching him to do her the honour,
Of asking the Christian folks to a feast.
'To please them I will nobly labour.'
The Sultan said: 'I accept at your behest,'
And, kneeling thanked her for her request.
So glad he was he knew not what to say.
She kissed her son, and home she went her way.

PART TWO

he Christian folk have reached the land
Of Syria, with a great solemn rout,
Swiftly a message left the Sultan's hand
First to his mother, then to all about,
And said his wife was here, without doubt.
And asked her to ride and meet his Queen,
That his kingdom's honour should be green.

Great was the throng and rich was the array
Of Syrians and Romans in that place.
The mother of the Sultan, rich and gay,
Received her also with as glad a face
As mother might her daughter there embrace.
And to the nearest city there beside
At a gentle pace they thither ride.

I doubt that the triumph of Julius,
Of which Lucan makes such a boast
Was more royal or more curious
Than was the meeting of this splendid host.
But this scorpion, this wicked ghost,
The Sultaness, for all her flattering,
Planned in her heart full mortally to sting.

The Sultan himself arrived soon after this,
So royally, it was wonderful to tell.
He welcomes her with every joy and bliss.
And thus in mirth and joy I'll let him dwell;
The fruit of this matter I must tell.
In due time, men thought it for the best
That revel ended, men went to their rest.

The day arrived, when this old Sultaness
Had ordained the feast of which I told,
And to the feast Christian folk addressed
Themselves, in general, both young and old.
Here may men feast and royalty behold,
And dainties more than I could so devise –
But all too dearly paid for ere they rise.

O sudden woe that ever is successor
To worldly bliss, mixed with bitterness!
The end of joy in all our earthly labour!
Woe occupies the bound of our gladness.
Hark to this counsel, such our auspices:
'On the glad day bear it well in mind
That unknown woe or harm comes on behind.'

For briefly for to tell, in a word,
The Sultan and the Christians every one
Were hacked to pieces, stabbed at the board,
Except for our Dame Constance alone.
The old Sultaness, that cursed crone,
Has with her friends done this cursed deed,
For she herself would all that country lead.

There was not one Syrian that converted,
No member of the Sultan's council but
Was hewn to pieces, none had death averted.
And Constance have they taken now, hot-foot,
And in a ship all rudderless is she put,
God knows, and told to study how to sail
From Syria to Italy, calm or gale.

A certain treasure, brought with her, they add,
And, truth to tell, victuals in great plenty,
Were given her with the clothes she had;
And forth she sailed into the salt sea.
O my Constance, full of benignity,
O Emperor's young daughter dear,
He that is lord of Fortune, shall you steer!

She crossed herself, and with full piteous voice,
Unto the cross of Christ thus spoke she:
'O bright, o joyful altar, holy cross,
Reed of the Lamb's blood, full of pity,
That wash the world of old iniquity,
Me from the fiend and his claws now keep,
That day that I shall drown in the deep!

Victorious Tree, protection of the true,
Thou alone worthy were to bear
The King of Heaven, with His wounds new,
The white Lamb, that hurt was with a spear;
Driver of fiends from every him and her
Over whom your arms faithfully extend,
Protect and grant me strength my life to amend!'

For years and days driven was this creature
Through the seas of Greece, unto the strait
Of Morocco, her fate it was to adventure.
Of many a sorry meal now she ate!
On her death full often must she wait,
Ere that the wild waves shall her drive
To any shore whence succour might arrive.

Men might ask why then she was not slain
At the feast itself? Who did her body save?
And I reply to that demand again,
Who saved Daniel in the dreadful cave,
Where every man save he, master and knave,
Was eaten by lions before he could depart?
No one but God, whom he bore in his heart.

God wished to show a wondrous miracle
In her, for us to see how great his work is.
Christ, that is remedy for every fickle
Act of fate, by means that learned clerics
Know of, does many a thing that full dark is
To Man's wit, and in our ignorance
We cannot know His careful providence.

Now, since she was not drenched in gore,
What kept her then from drowning in the sea?
Well, who kept Jonah in the whale's maw,
Till he was spouted up in Nineveh?
Men must know that it was none but He
That kept the Hebrew people from drowning,
With dry feet through the Red Sea passing.

Who bade the four spirits of the tempest,
That have the power to trouble land and sea,
Both north and south, and also east and west,
'Trouble not the waves, nor land nor tree'?
Truly, of that the commander was He
That from the tempest ever this woman kept,
As well when she awoke as when she slept.

What meat and drink for her then on the wave
Three years and more beyond the sight of sail?
Who fed Mary of Egypt in the cave
Or the desert? No one but Christ, *sans* fail.
Five thousand folk were in a greater tale
On loaves five and fishes two to feed.
God sent his plenty in hour of need.

She is driven out into our ocean
Through the wild sea, till at the last
Below a castle, known to no man,
Far in Northumberland, she was cast.
And in the sand her vessel stuck so fast
That it remained from turn to turn of tide;
The will of Christ was that she should abide.

The Constable of the castle came there
To see the wreck, and in the vessel sought,
And found this weary woman full of care;
He found also the treasure that she brought
In her own language mercy she besought,
The life out of her body fate to win,
And deliver her from the woe that she was in.

A sort of degenerate Latin was her speech,
But nevertheless he yet could understand.
This Constable, when nought was left to seek,
Brought this woeful woman to the land.
She knelt down, blessed God's saving hand;
But as to who she was gave no reply,
For foul or fair, though she might die.

She said, she was confounded by the sea
Her memory was gone, in very truth.
And the Constable had for her such pity
And his wife too, that they wept forsooth.
She was so diligent, eager in her youth,
To serve and please all who were in that place
That all loved her who looked on her face.

The Constable, and Dame Hermengild his wife,
Were pagan, as was that country everywhere.
But Hermengild loved her as her life,
And Constance had so long sojourned there,
In orisons, with many a bitter tears,
Till Jesus converted through his grace
Dame Hermengild, the lady of the place.

In all that land no Christians were about;
All Christian folk had fled the country,
For pagans had conquered, made a rout,
On all the northern shores, by land and sea.
To Wales had fled that Christianity
Of ancient Britons living in this isle;
There was its refuge for the meanwhile.

But Christian Britain was not so exiled
That there was not a few that secretly
Honoured Christ, and heathen folk beguiled;
And of such by the castle there lived three.
One of them was blind, and could not see
Except with the eyes within the mind,
With which men see when they are blind.

Bright was the sun on that summer's day
On which the Constable and his wife also
And Constance had taken the direct way
Towards the sea, a furlong off or two,
To take their pleasure, roaming fro and to.
And on their walk this blind man they met,
Bent and old, with eyes fast shut and set.

'In Christ's name,' cried out this blind Briton,
'Dame Hermengild, give me my sight again!'
This lady grew fearful at the sound,
Lest her husband, briefly to explain,
Should for her love of Christ have her slain;
Till Constance made bold, and bade her work
The will of Christ, as daughter of his church.

The Constable was troubled at the sight,
And said: 'What means it then, this affair?'
Constance answered: 'Sir, it is Christ's might,
Who helps folks from out the foul fiend's snare.'
And so our faith began she to declare,
Till she the Constable, before that eve,
Converted, and in Christ made him believe.

The Constable was not lord of this place
Where he found Constance on the sand,
But held it strongly, many winters' space,
Under Alla, King of Northumberland,
That was full wise and strong of hand
Against the Scots, as men are aware.
But I turn now again to my matter.

Satan, that waits for us to beguile,
Saw of Constance all her perfection,
And cast about how he might her defile,
And made a young knight dwelling in that town
Love her so hotly, with a foul affection,
That truly he thought to die, or live until
He of her might once have had his will.

He wooed her then, but it availed him not –
She would not sin at all in any way.
And out of spite he plotted in his thought
A shameful death indeed for her, I say.
Waiting till the Constable was away,
Secretly upon a night he crept
Into Hermengild's chamber while she slept.

Wearied, with making of her orisons,
Constance sleeps, and Hermengild also.
This knight, through Satan's temptations
All stealthily towards the bed does go,
And at once slits Hermengild's throat,
And lays the bloody knife by Dame Constance
And goes his way – may God bring him mischance!

Soon after comes the Constable home again,
Along with Alla, that king was of those lands,
And saw his wife pitilessly slain,
At which full oft he wept and wrung his hands.
And in the bed the bloody knife he found
Beside Dame Constance. Alas, what could she say?
For very woe her wits went all astray.

To King Alla was told all this mischance,
And the time, and where, and in what wise
That in a ship was found this Dame Constance,
As before you have heard me advise.
The king's heart melted in his eyes
When he saw so gentle a creature
Lost in suffering and misadventure.

For as the lamb towards its death is brought,
So stands this innocent before the king.
The false knight that has this treason wrought
Accuses her of doing this dark thing.
But nonetheless there was great mourning
Among the people, saying they would not guess
That she could do so great a wickedness.

That they had ever seen her virtuous,
And loving Hermengild as her life,
Of this bore witness all in that house,
Save he that slew Hermengild with his knife.
The noble king heard far and wide
This testimony, and thought to enquire
Deep into this, and find the truth entire.

Alas, Constance, you have no champion,
Nor can you fight yourself, so well-away!
But he that died for our redemption
And bound Satan (who lies where he lay),
May He be your strong champion this day!
Unless Christ an open miracle display,
Guiltless you shall be slain without delay.

She fell upon her knees, and thus she said:
'Immortal God, that did save Susanna
From calumny, and you, merciful maid,
Mary I mean, daughter of Saint Anna,
Before whose child angels sing Hosanna,
If I be guiltless of this felony,
My succour be, or else I shall die!'

Have you not seen sometimes a pale face
Among the throng, of him that has been led
Towards his death, having obtained no grace,
And such a hue over his face has spread,
Men might know his face as one in dread
Among all the faces there to be found?
So stands Constance, and gazes all around.

O Queens, living in prosperity
Duchesses, and you ladies every one,
Take pity on her in adversity!
An Emperor's daughter stands alone;
She has no one to whom to make her moan.
O blood royal, that stands in dread indeed,
Far off are your friends in your great need!

This King Alla had such compassion,
As noble heart is filled full of pity,
That from his eyes ran the water down.
'Now swiftly go fetch a Book,' quoth he,
'And if this knight will swear that she
This woman slew, we will consider much
On whom we wish to nominate as judge.'

A British Book, in which were the Gospels,
Was fetched, and on this book he swore anon
She guilty was, it instantly befell
That a hand smote him on the neck-bone,
And down he fell lifeless as a stone,
And both his eyes burst from his face,
In sight of everybody in that place.

A voice was heard in general audience,
And said: 'You have slandered the innocent,
A daughter of Holy Church in high presence.
So have you done, yet I remain silent!'
The throng was struck with amazement,
At this wonder, dumb stood every one
For fear of vengeance, save Constance alone.

Great was the dread, and also the repentance,
Of those who had harboured false suspicion
Of the innocent and humble Constance.
And for this miracle, in conclusion,
And through Constance's mediation,
The king, and many another in that place,
Converted were, thanks be to Christ's grace!

The false knight had been slain in untruth
By judgement of Alla, instantly,
And yet Constance had pity for his youth.
And after this Jesus of his mercy
Made Alla marry full solemnly
This holy maid, who is so bright serene.
And so has Christ made Constance a queen.

But who was woeful, and I tell no lie,
At this wedding, but Donegild alone,
The king's mother, full of tyranny?
She thought her cursed heart would break;
She wished her son had not done so.
She thought it an insult he should take
A foreign creature to be his mate.

Now I'd not wish from chaff and straw
To make so long a tale, but from good corn.
Why should I tell then of the wealth they pour
Out for the marriage, the course first borne,
Who blows upon the trumpet or the horn?
The fruit of every tale is but to say:
They eat and drink, and dance, and sing, and play.

They went to bed, both reasonable and right,
For though wives are the holiest of things,
They must accept patiently at night
Such necessary customs as are pleasing
To folk that have wedded them with rings,
And lay their holiness somewhat aside
On such occasions – it cannot be denied.

He begat a boy child on her anon;
And to the Constable and Bishop he,
Gave his wife to guard when he was gone
To Scotland, there his enemies to seek.
Now fair Constance, who is so humble and meek
So far is gone with child, that calm and still
She lies in her chamber, abiding Christ's will.

The time is come, a boy child she bears;
Mauricius at the font they him name.
The Constable summons a messenger,
And writes to his king, Alla, the same,
With blissful tidings how the child came
And other news expedient to say.
He takes the letter, and goes on his way.

This messenger, for his own advantage,
To the king's mother swiftly rides,
And greets her full fair in this language:
'Madame,' quoth he, 'you may be glad and blithe,
And thank God a hundred thousand times:
My lady has a child, of that no doubt,
To the joy and bliss of all the land about.

Lo, here, these sealed letters speak the thing,
Which I must bear with all the haste I may.
If you have aught for your son the king,
I am your servant, both night and day.'
Donegild answered: 'Not at this time, nay.
But here tonight I would you'd take your rest;
Tomorrow will I tell you all the rest.'

The messenger drank deep of ale and wine,
And stolen were his letters secretly
Out of his box, while he slept like a swine.
And counterfeited was all subtly
Another letter, wrought all sinfully,
Unto the king addressed about the matter
From his Constable, as you'll hear after.

The letter claimed the Queen delivered was
Of so horrible a fiendish creature
That in the castle none so stalwart was
To dare for any time there to endure.
The mother was an elf, peradventure
Come by charms or by sorcery,
And every soul hated her company.

Woe was the king with this letter plain,
But spoke to no one of his sorrows sore,
And on his own hand he wrote again:
'Welcome what Christ sends for evermore
To me that am now learned in His lore!
Lord, welcome be your wish and action;
All mine is subject to your direction.

'Defend this child, though it be foul or fair,
And my wife also, till my home-coming.
Christ, when he wish, may send me an heir
More agreeable than this to my liking.'
This letter he sealed, privately weeping,
Which to the messenger was taken soon,
And off he goes; no more was to be done.

O messenger, filled full of drunkenness,
Strong is your breath, your limbs falter they,
And all your secrets you confess.
Your mind is gone, you chatter like a jay;
Your face altered features does display.
Where drunkenness reigns in the house
There is no counsel hid, have no doubt.

O Donegild, there's no English of mine
Fit for your malice and your tyranny,
And therefore to the fiend I you resign;
Let him write further of your treachery!
Fie, human monster! – No, by God, I lie! –
Fie, fiendish spirit! For I dare say well,
Though you walk here, your spirit is in Hell.

The messenger comes from the King again,
And at the King's Mother's court alights,
And she worked his confidence to gain,
And pleased him in everything she might.
He drank and filled his belly till the night;
He slept then, and snored in every wise
Until the morning sun began to rise.

Again were his letters stolen every one,
And counterfeit letters penned like this:
'The King commands his Constable anon,
On pain of hanging and severe justice,
That he should in no manner suffer his
Wife Constance in the land, she to abide
Three days more, and the quarter of a tide;

But in the same ship where she was found,
Her and her young son and all her gear
He should set, and thrust her from the land,
And charge her to nevermore come here.'
O my Constance, well may your spirit fear,
And sleeping, in your dream, feel the pangs,
When Donegild decrees this ordinance!

The messenger that morrow, when he woke,
Hastened to the castle the nearest way,
And to the Constable he the letter took.
And seeing what this sad letter had to say,
Full often he said: 'Alas!' and 'Well-away!'
'Lord Christ,' quoth he, 'how may this world endure,
So full of sin is many a creature?

Almighty God, if it should be your will,
Since you are the true Judge, how can it be
That you will allow innocent blood to spill,
And wicked folk to reign in prosperity?
O good Constance, alas, so woe is me,
That I must be your tormentor, or pay
In shameful death; there is no other way.'

Both young and old wept in that place,
When the King this cursed letter sent.
And Constance, with a deadly pale face,
On the fourth day to her ship she went.
Nevertheless with inward content
She bowed to Christ's will, knelt on the sand,
And said: 'Lord, welcome is your command!

He that has defended me from blame
While I was on the shore among you,
He will keep me from all harm and shame
On the salt sea, though I know not how.
As strong as ever He was, so is He now.
In Him I trust, and in His Mother dear,
Who is to me my sail, and He will steer.'

Her little child lay weeping in her arms,
And kneeling, piteously to him she said:
'Peace, little son, I will do you no harm.'
With that her head-cloth she disarrayed,
And doffing it, over his eyes it laid,
And in her arms she lulled him full fast,
And up to Heaven her eyes she cast.

'Mother,' quoth she, and maiden bright, Marie,
True it is, that through woman's frail intent
Mankind was ruined, and condemned was he,
For which your child was on the Cross rent.
Your blessed eyes witnessed His torment;
Thus is there no comparison between
Your woe, and any woe that man has seen.

You saw your child slain before your eyes,
And yet now lives my little child, in faith.
Now lady bright, who hears all woeful cries,
You glory of womanhood, you fair maid,
You haven of refuge, bright star of day,
Pity my child, and in your gentleness
Pity the pitiful, in sore distress.

O little child, alas, what is your guilt
That never sinned as yet, can it be
That your harsh father shall have you killed?
O mercy, dear Constable,' quoth she,
'Let my little child dwell still with thee!
And if you dare not save him, fearing blame,
Yet kiss him once in his father's name!'

With this she looked back towards the land,
And said: 'Farewell, my husband, pitiless!'
And up she rose and walked across the sand
Towards the ship; her followed all the rest.
And ever she prayed her child to cry the less,
And took her leave, and with holy intent
She crossed herself, and into the ship she went.

Victualled fully was the ship, indeed
Abundantly for her, a longish space;
And other necessaries she would need
She had enough, praised be God's grace!
May wind and weather bow to God's face,
And bring her home! I can no other say
Than through the sea she sets out on her way.

PART THREE

lla the King comes home soon after this
Back to his castle, that of which I told,
And asks where his wife and child is.
The Constable at his heart turned cold,
And plainly all the matter he him told –
As you have heard; I cannot tell it better –
And showed the King his seal and the letter,

And said: 'Lord, as you commanded me
On pain of death, so have I done, be certain.'
The messenger questioned was till he
Was forced to confess, blunt and plain,
From night to night in what place he had lain.
And thus by close and subtle enquiry
It was conceived from whom this harm might be,

The hand was revealed that letter wrote,
And all the venom of this cursed deed,
But in what manner, certainly I know not.
The outcome was this: that Alla, as is said,
His mother slew – that all might know instead
How, traitor, she had failed in her allegiance.
So ends old Donegild, cursed in all that land!

The sorrow that this Alla night and day,
Feels for his wife and for his child also,
There is no tongue that tell it may.
But now will I again to Constance go,
Who drifts about the sea, in pain and woe,
Five years or more, at Christ's command,
Before her ship draws near to land.

Below a heathen castle at long last,
Of which no name in my text I find,
Constance and her child the sea up-cast.
Almighty God, who saves all mankind,
Have Constance and her child in mind,
To fall now into heathen hands her doom,
At brink of death, as I shall show you soon.

Down from the castle to gaze on this sight
Came many a one, and found Constance;
But shortly, from the castle in the night
The lord's steward – God curse him at a glance! –
A thief that abjured our faith, did prance,
Came to the ship alone and said he should
Lie with her, no matter if she would.

The wretched woman then was woebegone;
Her child cried, and she cried piteously.
But blessed Mary helped her right anon;
For with her struggling hard and fiercely
The thief fell overboard, and suddenly
Was drowned beneath the sea, in vengeance,
And so Christ, undefiled keeps this Constance.

O foul lust and lechery, lo, your end!
Not only that you darken a man's mind,
But truly you will his body take and rend.
The end of your work or passions blind
Is lamentation. How often men will find,
That not for the act, but for the intent
To commit the sin, they are killed or rent?

How could this frail woman have the strength
To defend herself against this renegade?
O Goliath, immeasurable in length,
How has David your might un-made,
And he so young, in armour un-arrayed?
How did he dare to gaze on your dread face?
Well can men see, it was but by God's grace.

Who gave Judith courage or hardiness
To slay King Holofernes in his tent,
And deliver out of wretchedness
The people of God? I say it was meant,
And just as God a spirit of vigour sent
To them, and saved them from mischance,
So sent he might and vigour to Constance.

Forth goes her ship through the narrow mouth
Of Gibraltar and Ceuta, then, drifts away,
Sometimes west, sometimes north and south,
And sometimes east, for many a weary day.
Till Christ's Mother – blessed be she always! –
Determines through her endless goodness
To make an end of all her heaviness.

Now let us turn from Constance for a throw,
And speak about the Roman Emperor,
Who out of Syria in letters came to know
Of the slaughter of Christians, and dishonour
Done to his daughter by a false traitor;
I mean the cursed wicked Sultaness,
Who had so many slain at the feast.

At which the Emperor has sent anon
His Senator, with royal ordinance,
And other lords, God knows, many a one,
On the Syrians to take high vengeance.
They burn, slay, and bring them mischance
For many a day; but to make and end:
Homeward to Rome their way they wend.

This Senator returned in victory
To Rome, sailing full royally,
And met the ship adrift, so goes the story,
In which Constance sat so piteously.
He knew nothing of who she was, or why
She was in such state, nor would she supply
One word about her rank, though she should die.

He brought her back to Rome, and to his wife
He gave her, and her young son also,
And with the Senator she led her life.
Thus can Our Lady bring us out of woe,
Woeful Constance and many another so;
And long time she dwelled in that place,
Doing holy works ever, in her grace.

The Senator's wife her own aunt was,
But for all that she knew her no more.
I will no longer tarry on the case,
But to Alla, of whom I spoke before,
Who weeps for his wife and sighs full sore,
I will return, and I will leave Constance
Under the Senator's governance.

King Alla, who had his mother slain,
Fell one day into such repentance
That, to tell you briefly, and explain,
To Rome he came, to do his penance,
And to obey the Pope's ordinance
In high and low, and Jesus Christ besought
To forgive the wicked works he had wrought.

The news at once through the town was borne
That Alla the King came in pilgrimage,
By harbingers of him, that came before;
And so the Senator, as was his usage,
Rode out again, and many of his lineage,
As much to show his great magnificence
As to do any king a reverence.

Great welcome does this noble Senator
Show King Alla, and he to him also;
Each of them does the other great honour.
And so it befell, in a day or so,
This Senator to King Alla is to go
To dine, I will not lie, and thus briefly,
Constance's son went in his company.

Some say the request came from Constance
That the Senator take the child to the feast.
I cannot tell every circumstance;
Be as it may, there he was at least.
But true it is, that at his mother's behest
Before Alla, during the meal's space,
The child stood, and gazed at the King's face.

King Alla in this child found a wonder,
And to the Senator he said anon:
'Whose is that fair child standing yonder?'
I know not,' quoth he, 'by God and by Saint John!
A mother he has, but father had he none
That I know of' – and briefly he unwound
The tale to Alla of how the child was found.

'But God knows,' said this Senator also,
'So virtuous a being in my life
As she I never saw, nor heard of, no,
Of worldly women, whether maid or wife.
I dare well say she'd rather feel the knife
Through her breast than be a wicked woman;
No man could bring her to that condition.'

Now was this child as like to Constance
As it were possible for child to be.
And Alla has the face in his remembrance
Of Dame Constance, and on this mused he,
If that the child's mother could chance to be
His wife, and secretly began to sigh,
And left the table swiftly as he might.

'By my faith,' quoth he, a ghost is in my head!
I must believe, by every rational judgement,
That in the salt sea my wife is dead.'
Yet after that he made this argument:
'How do I know that Christ has not sent
My wife here by sea, as once was his intent
To bring her to my land from which she went?'

And after noon, home with the Senator
Goes Alla, to pursue this wondrous chance.
The Senator does Alla great honour
And swiftly he sends for Constance.
But trust in this, it did not make her dance
When she knew the reason for this command,
Barely upon her feet could she stand.

Alla greeted his wife fair, when they met,
And wept so much it was pitiful to see;
For at the first look that on her he set
He knew in very truth that it was she.
And she for sorrow stood dumb as a tree,
So was her heart imprisoned by distress,
When she remembered all his harshness.

Twice she swooned before him in his sight,
He wept and sought her pardon piteously.
'Now God,' quoth he, 'and all his saints bright,
As surely may on my soul have mercy
If of your harm not innocent am I
As is Maurice my son, so like in face –
Else the fiend may drag me from this place!'

Long was the sobbing and the bitter pain
Ere that their woeful hearts might have peace.
Great was the pity to hear him weep again,
Through which her woe would then increase.
I pray you all from labour me release;
I may not tell their woe until tomorrow –
I am too weary now to speak of sorrow.

But finally, when all the truth men know,
That Alla was innocent of all her woe,
A hundred times to kissing do they go,
And such a bliss is there between the two
That save the joy that is eternal so,
None like it has been seen by any creature
Or ever will, while this world shall endure.

Then she prayed her husband humbly,
To help ease her long-troubled mind,
That he would beg her father especially,
That of his majesty he would incline
To vouchsafe with him someday to dine.
She begged him also he should in no way
Tell her father of this that she did say.

Some men say how that the child Maurice
Carried this message to the Emperor;
But, as I guess, Alla was not so foolish
As to send, to one of sovereign honour –
He that is of Christian folk the flower –
A child indeed; but wiser still I deem
For him to go himself, as it would seem.

The Emperor answered courteously
The dinner invitation as he besought;
And as I read here, he gazed intently
At this child, and of his daughter thought.
Alla goes to his inn, and as he ought
Arrays himself for the feast in every wise,
As perfectly as his skill might suffice.

The morrow came, and Alla began to dress,
And his wife also, the Emperor to meet,
And off they ride in joy and gladness.
And when she saw her father in the street,
She alighted and fell down at his feet.
'Father,' quoth she, 'your young child Constance
Is now clean lost from your remembrance.

'I am your daughter Constance,' quoth she,
'That you once sent into Syria.
It is I, father, that in the salt sea
Was lost alone, and condemned to suffer.
Now father, have mercy on your daughter!
Send me no more into heathenness,
But thank my lord here for his kindness.'

Who can the merciful joy tell all
Betwixt those three, now they are met?
But of my tale make an end I shall;
The day goes fast, I will no longer let
Time slip: this glad folk to dinner sit;
In joy and bliss at dinner let them dwell,
A thousand-fold more than I can tell.

The child Maurice after was Emperor
Crowned by the Pope, in Christianity;
To Christ's Church he did great honour.
But I let all his story fly from me;
Of Constance is my tale especially.
In the old Roman chronicles we find
Maurice's life; I have it not in mind.

King Alla, when there came the chosen day,
With his Constance, his holy wife so sweet,
To England they sailed the nearest way,
Where they lived in joy and in quiet.
But little while it lasted, I admit,
Joy of this world, since time will not abide;
From day to day it changes as the tide.

Who lived ever in such delight all day
That in him there moved no instance
Of anger, or desire, some kin's affray,
Envy or pride, or passion, or offence?
I will only say to end this sentence,
But a little while in a joyful sense
Lasted the bliss of Alla and Constance.

For death takes of high and low his rent:
When a year had passed, even as I guess,
Life in this world for King Alla was spent,
At which Constance felt such great sadness.
Now let us pray that God his soul bless!
And Dame Constance, finally to say,
Towards the town of Rome goes her way.

To Rome, is come this holy creature,
And finds her friends there whole and sound;
Now escaped from all her adventures.
And when that she her father has found;
Down on her knees falls she to the ground;
Weeping for tenderness with heart blithe,
She praises God a hundred thousand times.

In virtue and in holy alms' deeds
They all live, and never asunder wend;
Till death parts them from this life they lead.
And fare well now, my tale is at an end.
Now Jesus Christ, in His might may He send
Joy after woe, and govern us in His grace,
And protect us all that are in this place! Amen.

Here Ends the Man of Law's Tale

The Epilogue to the Man of Law's Tale

ur Host upon his stirrups stood anon,
And said: 'Good men, hearken everyone!
That was a nifty tale! All gold, no stones!
Sir Parish Priest,' quoth he, 'for God's bones,
Tell us a tale, as you promised us before.
As I know well you men learned in lore
Are full of knowledge, by God's dignity.'
The Parson answered: '*Benedicitee!*
What ails the man so sinfully to swear?'
Our Host answered, 'O Jankin, are you there?
I smell a Lollard in the wind!' quoth he.
'Now good men,' quoth our Host, hark to me!
Abide, for God's noble passion,
For we shall have – in preacher's fashion –
This Lollard tell us piously what's what.'
'Nay, by my father's soul, that shall he not!'
Said the Shipman, 'Here shall he not preach.
He shall no gospel gloss for us, nor teach.
We live all in the great God's eye,' quoth he,
'He would sow for us some difficulty,
Or scatter tares about in our clean corn.
And therefore, Host, I warn you before
My handsome body a fine tale shall tell,
And ring for you so merry a bell,
That I shall waken all this company.
But it shall not be of philosophy,
No *physicus*, no strange terms in law.
There is but little Latin in my maw!'

(*The authenticity of the Epilogue has been questioned.*)

THE WIFE OF BATH'S PROLOGUE

THE PROLOGUE TO THE WIFE OF BATH'S TALE

xperience, though no authority
Ruled in this world, would be enough for me
To speak of the woe that is in marriage.
For, lordings, since I twelve years was of age,
Thanks be to God who eternally does thrive,
Husbands at church-door have I had five –
If it be allowed so oft to wedded be –
And all were worthy men in their degree.
But I was told, for sure, and not long since,
That since Christ never went but once
To a wedding, in Cana of Galilee,
That by the same example He taught me
That I should only be wedded once.
Hark too, lo, what sharp words for the nonce
Beside a well, Jesus, God and Man,
Spoke in reproof of the Samaritan:
'You have had five husbands,' quoth he,
'And that same man that now has thee
Is not your husband' – so he said for certain.
What he meant by that, I can't explain;
But I ask you why the fifth man
Was not husband of the Samaritan?
How many was she allowed in marriage?
I have never yet had despite my age
Of that number any definition.
Men may divine and gloss, up and down,
But well I know, indeed, without a lie,

God bade us all to wax and multiply.
That gentle text I well can understand!
And I know too He said that my husband
Should leave father and mother and cleave to me;
But of no number mention made He,
Of bigamy or of octogamy.
Why should men then speak of it evilly?
  Lo, here, the wise King, old Solomon,
I think he had more wives than one!
As would to God it were permitted me
To be refreshed half so oft as he!
A gift of God had he of all those wives!
No man has such that's in this world alive.
God knows, that noble king, as I see it,
The first night had many a merry fit
With each of them, so happy was his life!
Blessed be God, that I have wedded five,
And they I picked out from all the best,
Both for their nether purse and their chest.
Diverse schools make perfect clerks,
And diverse practice in many sundry works,
Makes the workman perfect, certainly.
Of five husbands have I made a study;
Welcome the sixth, whenever he befall!
Forsooth, I will not keep me chaste in all;
When my husband from this world is gone,
Some Christian man shall wed me anon.
For then the Apostle says that I am free
To wed, in God's name, where it pleases me.
He says to be wedded is no sin, I learn:
'Better to be wedded than to burn.'
What care I if folk speak maliciously
Of wicked Lamech and his bigamy?
I know that Abraham was a holy man,
And Jacob also, as far as ever I can,
And each of them had more wives than two,
And many another holy man had too.

Where can you show me, in any age
That God on high forbade our marriage
By express word? I pray you, tell it me.
Or where commanded he virginity?
I know as well as you, what he said,
The Apostle, when he spoke of maidenhead,
He said that precepts for it he had none.
Men may counsel a woman to live alone,
But counselling is no commandment;
He has left it to our own judgement.
For had God commanded maidenhood,
Then had he ended marriage and for good.
And surely, if there were never seed sown,
Virginity, where would that be grown?
Paul did not dare command, not in the least,
A thing of which his Master never preached.
The spear, the prize, is there of virginity;
Catch it who may, and who runs best let's see!
  But this word is not said of every wight,
Rather God's pleased to grant it of his might.
I know well that the Apostle was a maid,
But nonetheless, though he wrote and said
He wished that everyone was such as He,
He was but counselling virginity,
And to be wife he still gave me leave
Of indulgence; so no reproof indeed,
If my husband die, in wedding me,
No objection on grounds of bigamy,
Though it were good no woman for to touch –
He meant in bed or on a couch or such –
For peril it is, fire and tow to assemble –
You know what this image does resemble!
The long and short: he held virginity
More perfect than marriage in frailty.
Frailty I say, unless the he and she
Would live all their life in chastity.
I grant it well, I would have no envy,

Though maidenhood devalue bigamy.
They like to be clean in body and ghost.
And of my state I will make no boast;
For you well know, a lord in his household
Has not ever vessel made all of gold.
Some are of wood, and do good service.
God calls folk in sundry ways like this,
And everyone has from God his own gift,
Some this, some that, as is in His wish.
  Virginity is a great perfection
And continence also with devotion.
But Christ, of perfection is the well,
And bade not everyone to go and sell
All that he had, and give it to the poor,
And in that guise follow him, for sure.
He spoke to those who would live perfectly;
And, lordings, by your leave, that is not me!
I will bestow the flower of my age
On the actions and the fruits of marriage.
  Tell me then, to what end and conclusion
Were made the members of generation,
And in so perfect wise Man was wrought?
Trust me right well, they were not made for naught.
Gloss as you will and give the explanation
That they were made merely for purgation
Of urine, and both our things, so the tale,
Made but to know the female from the male,
And for no other purpose – say you no?
Experience knows well it is not so.
So long as the clerics with me be not wrath,
I say this: that they are made for both –
That is to say, for office and for ease
Of procreation, that we not God displease.
Why else is it in the books clearly set
That a man shall pay his wife her debt?
Now wherewith should he make his payment,
If he did not use his blessed instrument?

Thus were they added to the creature
To purge urine, and continue nature.
  But I do not say every wight is told
That has such tackle, as I unfold,
To go and use it to engender there –
Or men for chastity would have no care.
Christ was a maid, yet formed as a man,
And many a saint since the world began,
Yet lived they ever in perfect chastity.
I have no quarrel with virginity;
Of pure wheat-seed let them be bred,
And let us wives be dubbed barley-bread –
And yet with barley-bread, as Mark can
Remind you, Jesus fed full many a man.
In such a state as God has called us,
I will persevere; I am not precious.
In wifehood will I use my instrument
As freely as my Maker has it sent.
If I be niggardly, God give me sorrow!
My husband shall have it eve and morrow,
When he would come forth and pay his debt.
A husband I will have, I will as yet,
Who shall be both my debtor and my thrall,
And bear the tribulation withal
On his own flesh, while I am his wife.
I have the power during my whole life
Over his proper body, and not he.
Right thus the Apostle told it me,
And bade our husbands for to love us well;
On that saying I ever like to dwell.'
  Up started the Pardoner, and that anon:
'Now dame,' quoth he, 'by God and by Saint John,
You are a noble preacher in this cause!
I was about to wed a wife: I pause!
What! Should I pay, with my own flesh, so dear?
I'd rather wed no wife, then, any year!'
  'Abide,' quoth she, 'my tale's not yet begun.

Nay, you will drink from a different tun,
Before I go, and savour worse than ale.
And when I have told you all my tale
Of tribulation in marriage,
In which I am an expert at my age –
That is to say, I have been the whip –
Then please yourself whether you wish to sip
Of this tun that I shall broach.
Beware of it, before a close approach!
For I shall give examples more than ten.
'Whoever will not be warned by other men,
To other men shall an example be.'
These very words writes Ptolemy;
Read in his *Almagest*, and find them there.'
'Dame, I would pray you, if it is your care,'
Said this Pardoner, 'as you began,
Tell forth your tale; spare not any man,
And teach us young men of your practices.'
'Gladly,' quoth she, 'if you it pleases.
But yet I ask of all this company,
If I should chance to speak out of whimsy,
Take no offence then at what I say,
For my intention is but to play.
Now sir, then will I tell you all my tale.
If ever I might drink of wine or ale,
I shall speak true: those husbands that I had
Three of them were good, and two were bad.
The three good men were rich and old.
With difficulty only could they hold
To the articles that bound them to me –
You know well what I mean by that, I see!
So help me God, I laugh when I think
That sad to say they never slept a wink.
And, by my faith, I set by it no store.
They gave me land and treasure more;
I had no need to show them diligence
To win their love, or do them reverence.

They loved me so well, by God above
I had no need to set store by their love.
A wise woman will busy herself anon
To win her love, yes, if she has none.
But since I held them wholly in my hand,
And since they had given me all their land,
Why should I be concerned to please,
Except for my own profit and my ease?
I set them so to work, by my faith,
That many a night they sang "well-away!"
But never for us the flitch of bacon though,
That some may win in Essex at Dunmow.
I ruled them so according to my law,
That each of them was blissful and in awe,
And brought me pretty things from the fair.
They were full glad when I spoke them fair,
For God knows, I chid them mercilessly.
  Now hearken how to act properly.
You wise wives that will understand,
Put them ever in the wrong, out of hand,
For half so boldly there never was a man
Could swear oaths and lie as woman can.
I say this not for wives who are wise,
Unless it be when they are mis-advised.
A wise wife, if she knows good from bad,
Will call the chattering magpies merely mad,
And obtain the witness of her own maid
To what she asserts – listen how I played:
  "Old sir dotard is this then your way?
Why is my neighbour's wife dressed so gay?
She is honoured now wherever she goes;
I sit at home; and lacking decent clothes.
What are you doing at my neighbour's house?
Is she so fair? Are you so amorous?
What do you whisper to the maid, *benedicitee*?
Old sir lecher, away with your trickery!
And if I have a gossip with a friend,

All innocently, you chide like the fiend
If I walk or wander to his house.
Yet you come home drunk as a mouse,
And preach from your chair, beyond belief!
You tell me, then, how it's a great mischief
To wed a poor woman, the expense,
And then if she's rich, of good descent,
Then you say it's a torment, and misery
To endure her pride and melancholy.
And if she be fair, you proper knave,
You say that every lecher has his way
With her, since none in chastity abide,
When they are assailed from every side.
  You say, that some desire us for our riches,
Some for our shapeliness, some for our fairness,
And some because we can sing or dance,
And some for gentleness and dalliance,
Some for our hands and arms so small –
By your word, thus to the devil go us all!
You say men never hold a castle wall,
If it is long laid siege to, it will fall.
And if she be foul, you say that she
Covets every man that she might see,
For like a spaniel she will at him leap
Till she finds some man to take her cheap;
Never a goose so grey swam on the lake
That, say you, it will not find a mate.
You say it's a hard thing to control
What no man willingly will hold.
Thus say you, lord, on your way to bed,
And that no wise man ever needs to wed,
Nor no man that has his eye on Heaven –
Wild thunderbolts and lightning-fire then
Fall on your withered neck till it be broke!
  You say that leaking roofs, and thick smoke,
And chiding wives can make men flee
From their own house – ah, *benedicitee*,

What ails the old man so to make him chide?
  You say we wives will all our vices hide
Till we be wed, and then we show them you.
That may well be the saying of a shrew!
  You say that oxen, asses, horse and hound,
Can be tried over every sort of ground,
Basins, bowls, before a man may buy;
Spoons, stools, and all such things we try,
And likewise pots, clothes, and finery,
But wives must remain a mystery
Till they be wedded, you old dotard shrew!
And then, we will our vices show, says you.
  You say too that it displeases me
Unless you forever praise my beauty,
And every moment pore o'er my face,
And call me "fair dame" in every place,
And lay out for a feast upon the day
When I was born, and make me fresh and gay,
And do my old nurse every honour,
And my chambermaid in my bower,
And my father's kin and his allies;
So say you, old barrel-full of lies!
  And yet because of our apprentice, Jankin,
And his crisp hair, that shines as gold so fine,
And his squiring me both up and down,
You harbour false suspicion, as I found;
I would not want him if you died tomorrow!
  But tell me this, why do you hide, a sorrow,
The keys of your chest away from me?
They are my goods as well as yours, pardee!
What, will you make an idiot of your dame?
Now, by that lord who is called Saint James,
You shall not both, whatever be your moods,
Be master of my body, and my goods.
One you shall forgo, so say I,
What need have you to enquire or spy?
I think you'd like to lock me in your chest!

You should say: "Wife, go where you wish.
Take your pleasure; I'll believe no malice.
I know you for a true wife, Dame Alice."
We love no man that keeps watch, takes charge
Of where we go; we wish to be at large.
  Of all men the most blessed must be,
That wise astrologer, old Ptolemy,
That writ this proverb in his *Almagest*:
"Of all men his wisdom is the highest
That cares not who has this world in his hand."
By this proverb you must understand,
If you've enough, why should you care
How merrily other folks do fare?
Be sure, old dotard, by your leave
You shall have all you wish at eve.
He is too great a niggard who will spurn
A man who wants a light from his lantern;
He will have no less light, pardee!
If you've enough, don't complain to me.
  You say too, if we make ourselves gay
With clothing, and with precious array,
It puts us in peril of our chastity.
And yet – curse it – you make free
With these words in the Apostle's name:
"In clothing made of chastity and shame
You women shall adorn yourselves," quoth he,
"And not with braided hair, or jewellery,
With pearls, or with gold, or clothes rich."
According to your text, as your tricks,
I'll not act, not as much as a gnat!
  You said then, that I was like a cat,
For whosoever singes a cat's skin
Then will the cat keep to his inn;
While if the cat's skin be sleek and gay,
She'll not dwell in that house half a day.
But out she'll pad, ere any daylight fall,
To show her skin, and go and caterwaul.

That is to say, if I feel gay, sir shrew,
I'll run and show my old clothes to the view.
Sir, old fool, what use to you are spies?
Though you beg Argus with his hundred eyes
To be my body-guard, since he best is,
In faith, he shall not if it's not my wish.
Yet I will trim his beard, as I may thee!
Then you said that there are things three,
The which things trouble all this earth,
And that no man may endure the fourth –
Away, sir shrew, Jesus trim your life!
You preach again and say a hateful wife
Is reckoned to be one of these mischances.
Are there then no other circumstances
You could address your parables to,
Without a poor wife acting one for you?
You even liken woman's love to Hell,
To barren land, where water may not dwell.
You liken it then, as well, to a wild fire:
The more it burns, the more it has desire
To consume everything that burnt can be.
You say, that just as insects kill a tree,
Just so a wife destroys her husband;
This they know who to a wife are bound."
Lordings, like this it was, you understand,
I kept my older husbands well in hand
With what they said in their drunkenness;
And all was false, but I had witnesses
In Jankin, and in my niece also.
O Lord, the pain I did them and the woe,
Full innocent, by God's sweet destiny!
For like a horse I could bite and whinny.
I could moan, when I was the guilty one
Or else I'd oftentimes been done and gone.
Who at the mill is first, first grinds their grain;
So was our strife ended: I did first complain.
They were right glad and quick to apologise

For things they never did in all their lives.
  For wenching I would take the man in hand,
Though him so sick he could hardly stand.
Yet it tickled his heart, in that he
Thought I was fond of him as he of me.
I swore that all my walking out at night
Was just to spy on the wenches that I cite;
Flying that flag caused me many a mirth.
For all such wit is given us at birth;
Deceit, weeping, spinning, God gives
To woman by nature, while she lives.
And of one thing I can boast, you see:
I had the better of them in high degree,
By cunning, force, or some manner of thing,
Such as continual murmuring and grumbling.
And in bed especially they had mischance:
There was my chiding and remonstrance.
I would no longer in the bed abide,
If I felt his arm across my side,
Till he had paid his ransom to me;
Then would I let him do his nicety.
And therefore every man this tale I tell,
Win whosoever may, for all's to sell!
With empty hand you will no falcon lure.
In winning would I all his lust endure,
And display a feigned appetite –
And yet in bacon I took no delight.
That was the cause ever I would them chide;
For though the Pope had sat down beside,
I would not spare them at their own board,
For, by my troth, I paid them word for word.
As may aid me God the Omnipotent,
Though I this minute make my testament,
I owe them not a word that was not quits!
I brought it about so by my wits
That they were forced to yield, for the best,
Or else we would never have found rest.

For though he might rage like a maddened lion,
Yet he would always fail in his conclusion.
  Then would I say: "My dear, note how meek
The look that Willikin displays, our sheep!
Come here, my spouse, let me kiss your cheek.
You should be as patient, and as meek,
And have as sweet and mild a conscience,
Since you preach so much of Job's patience.
Practice endurance ever that you preach;
And if you don't then certainly I'll teach
How fair it is to have a wife at peace.
One of us two must yield, at least,
And since a man is more reasonable
Than a woman, you should be tractable.
What ails you, to grumble so and groan?
Is it you would possess my sex alone?
Why, take it all; lo, have it every bit!
Saint Peter damn you if you don't enjoy it!
For if I were to sell my *belle chose*,
I could go as fresh as is the rose;
But I will keep it for your own use.
By God, you are to blame, and that's the truth."
  Such manner of words have we on hand.
Now will I speak of my fourth husband.
  My fourth husband was a reveller;
That is to say, he kept a lover.
And I was young, and my spirits high,
Stubborn and strong, and pert as a magpie.
How I danced to the harp, without fail,
And sang, indeed, like any nightingale,
When I had drunk a draught of sweet wine.
Metellius, the foul churl, the swine,
That with a stick robbed his wife of life
For drinking wine, though I had been his wife
Would never have frightened me from drink!
And after wine on Venus I would think,
For as surely as cold engenders hail,

A gluttonous mouth gets a lecherous tail.
A drunken woman has no true defence;
This lechers know from their experience.
  But, Lord Christ, whenever in memory
I recall my youth and all my jollity,
It tickles me about my heart's root.
To this day it does my heart good,
That I have had the world, in my time.
But age, alas, that poisons every clime,
Bereft me of beauty, vigour with it.
Let go, farewell; and the devil take it!
The flour is gone, what more is there to tell.
The bran, as best I can, now I must sell.
But yet to be right merry, I have planned!
Now will I tell you of my fourth husband.
  I say, I felt at heart a deal of spite
If he in any other took delight;
But he was paid, by God and Saint Judoc!
I made him of the same wood a crook –
Not of my body, in some foul manner,
But was such friends with folk, by and by,
That in his own grease I made him fry,
For anger, and for very jealousy.
By God, on earth I was his purgatory!
For which I hope his soul is in glory.
For, God knows, he sat full oft in song,
When his shoe pinched him all along.
There is none but God and he who knew
In how many ways I tortured him anew.
He died when I returned from Jerusalem,
And lies there buried under the rood-beam,
Albeit his tomb's not so curious
As was the sepulchre of Darius,
That Apelles sculpted subtly;
It were a waste to bury him preciously.
May he fare well, God give his soul rest!
He is now in his grave and in his chest.

Now of my fifth husband will I tell.
God may his soul never come to Hell!
And yet to me he was the worst, I know –
I feel it on my ribs all in a row,
And ever shall, until my dying day.
But in our bed he was so fresh, I say,
And could cajole me so, God knows,
When that he would have my *belle chose*,
That though he'd beaten me on every bone,
He could still win my love to him anon.
I swear I loved him best, because he
Was in his love niggardly to me.
We women have, you'll hear no lie from me,
In this affair a strange fantasy:
Whatever we may not easily get,
We cry all day and crave for it.
Forbid us aught, desire it then will we;
Press on us hard, and we will flee.
Reluctantly we show our goods at fairs;
Great crowds at market make for dear wares,
And what is cheap is held a worthless prize.
This knows every woman who is wise.
My fifth husband – God his soul bless! –
Whom I took for love, not for riches,
He sometime was a clerk of Oxford town,
And left the college, and seeking found
Lodgings with my friend, there made one –
God keep her soul! Her name was Alison.
She knew my heart, and my secrets she,
Better than our parish priest, trust me.
To her I revealed my secrets all;
For had my husband pissed against a wall,
Or done some crime that would cost his life,
To her, and to another worthy wife,
And to my niece, that I loved as well,
I would have told the secret, just to tell.
And so I did full often, God knows

It made his face full often like a rose,
Red hot for very shame, and sorry he
For telling me his secret privately.
  And so befell it that one day in Lent –
For often to my friend's house I went,
As ever yet I loved to laugh and play,
And to walk in March, April, and May,
To hear sundry tales among the alleys –
Jankin clerk, and I, and my friend Alice,
Into the fields about the city went.
My husband was in London all that Lent;
I had the greater leisure for to play,
And to see, and be seen, every day
By lusty folk. How did I know what grace
Might be my destiny, and in what place?
Therefore I made my visitations
Went to vigils, and also to processions,
To preaching too, and these pilgrimages,
To the miracle plays, and marriages,
And wore my gay scarlet as I might.
The worms, and the moths, and mites
Upon my soul, gnawed it never a bit;
And why? Well, I was never out of it.
  I'll tell you now what happened to me:
I say that in the fields around walked we,
Till truly we made such a dalliance,
This clerk and I, that at a chance
I spoke to him, and said to him that he,
If I became a widow, should marry me.
For certainly, with no false modesty,
I was never without a little surety
Of marriage, nor ever had far to seek.
I hold a mouse's heart not worth a leek,
That only has one little hole to bolt to,
And if that fail, then everything is through.
  I maintained he had enchanted me;
My mother taught me that subtlety.

And I said too, I dreamed of him all night;
He seemed to slay me as I lay upright,
And all my bed indeed was full of blood –
"But yet I hope that you will do me good,
For blood betokens gold as I was taught."
And all was false; I never dreamed of aught,
But by way of following mother's lore,
In things like that as well as others more.
  But now, sir – let me see – what's to explain?
Aha! By God, I have my tale again!
  When my fourth husband was on his bier,
I wept for hours, and sorry did appear –
As wives must, since it's common usage,
And with my kerchief covered up my visage.
But since I was provided with a mate,
I only wept a little, I should state.
To church was my husband borne that morrow,
With neighbours that wept for him in sorrow,
And Jankin, our clerk, was one of those.
So help me God, when I saw him go
After the bier, I thought he had a pair
Of legs and of feet so fine and fair,
That all my heart I gave to him to hold.
He was, I swear, but twenty winters old,
And I was forty, to tell the truth,
But yet I always had a coltish tooth.
Gap-toothed I was, and that became me well;
I'd the print of Venus' seal, truth to tell.
So help me God, I was a lusty one,
And fair, and rich, high-spirited and young!
And truly, as my husbands told me,
I had the finest *quoniam* that might be.
For certain, I am all Venereal
In feeling, and my heart is Martial.
Venus gave me my lust, lasciviousness,
And Mars gave me rebellious boldness.
My ascendant Taurus, with Mars therein –

Alas, alas, that ever love was sin!
I always followed my inclination,
By virtue of my constellation.
It made me so I could never withhold
My chamber of Venus from a fellow bold.
Yet have I Mars' mark upon my face,
And also in another private place.
For, God wisely be my salvation,
I never loved with any discretion,
But ever followed my appetite,
Whether he was long, or short, or black or white.
I cared not, so long as he liked me,
How rich he was, nor of what degree.
  What can I say, but at the month's end,
This jolly clerk Jankin, my godsend,
Wedded me with great solemnity,
And him I gave the land and property
All that had been given to me before.
But after I repented of it full sore;
He would allow me nothing I held dear.
By God, he smote me once on the ear,
Because I tore a page from his book,
So that my ear was deaf from the stroke.
Stubborn I was, as is a lioness,
And with a tongue nagging to excess,
And walk I would, as I had done before,
From house to house, something he deplored.
About which he often times would preach,
And of the old Roman tales he'd teach –
How Simplicius Gallus left his wife,
And forsook her for the rest of his life,
Because he saw her hatless in the way,
As he looked out his door one fine day.
  Another Roman, he told me his names,
Because his wife went to the summer Games
Without him knowing, he forsook her too.
And then would he to his Bible go anew

And seek that proverb of the Ecclesiast,
Where he commands and forbids, aghast:
"Man shall not suffer his wife to gad about."
Then would he speak like this, without doubt:
"Whoever builds his house of willows,
And spurs his blind horse o'er the fallows,
And sees his wife a pilgrim to All Hallows,
Is worthy to be hanged on the gallows!"
But all for naught – I cared never a haw
For his proverbs, and his old saw,
Nor would I by him corrected be.
I hate him who my vice tells to me;
And so do more, God knows, of us than I!
He was enraged with me, fit to die;
I could not stand him in any case, alas.
Now will I tell you true, by Saint Thomas,
Why I tore that page out of his book,
From which my ear was deafened by his stroke.
He had a book that gladly night and day,
For his pleasure he would read always.
He called it *Theophrastus and Valerius* –
At which he used to laugh fit to bust.
And then there was some clerk at Rome,
A Cardinal, named Saint Jerome,
Who made a book against Jovinian;
In which book bound up was Tertullian,
With Chrysippus, Trotula, Heloise,
That was abbess not far from Paris,
And the parables of Solomon,
Ovid's *Art of Love*, and many a one.
And all of these bound in the one volume,
And every night and day it was his custom,
When he had leisure and vacation
From other worldly occupation,
To read in this book of wicked wives.
He knew of them more legends and lives
Than there are of good wives in the Bible.

For trust me well, it is impossible
For any clerk to speak well of wives
Unless it is of holy saints' lives,
Never of any other woman though.
Who wrote the histories, tell me who?
By God, if women had written the stories
As clerics have within their oratories,
They'd have written of men more wickedness
Than all the sons of Adam could redress!
The children of Venus and Mercury
In all their workings are contrary:
Mercury loves wisdom and science,
And Venus loves spending, revelry, and dance.
And because of their diverse disposition,
Each is in fall in the other's exaltation;
So, God knows, Mercury is helpless,
In Pisces where exalted is Venus,
And Venus falls when Mercury is raised.
Therefore no woman is by cleric praised.
The clerk, when he is old, and cannot do
Of Venus' works the worth of his old shoe,
Then sits he down and writes in his dotage
That women cannot be true in marriage!
  But now to my purpose, as I told you,
How I was beaten for a book, all true.
One night Jankin, that was our sire,
Read his book, as he sat by the fire,
Of Eve first, that through her wickedness
Brought all mankind to wretchedness,
For which indeed was Jesus Christ slain,
Who purchased us with his heart's-blood again.
Lo here, expressed of women may you find,
That woman was the bane of all mankind!
  Then he read to me how Samson lost his hair:
Sleeping, his lover cut it with her shears,
Through which treason he lost both his eyes.
  Then he read me, for I'll tell no lies,

Of Hercules, Deianira, and the pyre
Where, through her, he set himself on fire.
  Nor did he miss the sorrow and woe too
That Socrates had with his wives two –
How Xantippe poured piss over his head.
The foolish man sat still, as he were dead.
He wiped his head; no more dare say again,
But: "Ere the thunder stops, comes the rain."
– Of Pasiphae, that was the Queen of Crete;
Out of maliciousness he thought that sweet –
Fie, speak no more, it is a grisly thing,
Of her fierce lust, and perverse liking!
– Of Clytemnestra, for her lechery
That made her husband die by treachery;
He read all that with great devotion.
  He told me also on what occasion
Amphiaraus at Thebes lost his life;
My husband had the legend of his wife,
Eriphyle, who for a necklace of gold
Secretly to all the Greeks had told
Of her husband's private hiding-place,
For which at Thebes he did misfortune taste.
  Of Livia he told me, and Lucilia:
They both killed their husbands there,
The one for love, the other out of hate.
Livia her husband one evening late
Empoisoned, because she was his foe.
Lucilia, lascivious, loved hers so
That, to make him always of her think,
She gave him such a manner of love-drink
That he was dead ere it was the morrow –
And thus in every way husbands have sorrow.
  Then he told me how one Latumius
Complained to his comrade Arrius,
That in his garden there grew a tree
On which he said that his wives three
Hanged themselves, for spite it was.

"Oh dear brother," quoth this Arrius,
"Give me a cutting from that blessed tree,
And in my garden planted it shall be!"
  Of wives of later date he also read,
How some had slain their husbands in their bed,
And let their lovers pleasure them all night,
While the corpse lay on the floor upright;
And some had driven nails through their brain,
While they were sleeping, and thus them slain.
Some had given them poison in their drink.
He spoke more harm than heart could think,
And with all that he knew more proverbs
Than in this world grow grass or herbs.
"Better," quoth he, "that your habitation
Be with a lion or a foul dragon,
Than with a woman who will always chide.
Better," quoth he, "high on the roof to abide,
Than with an angry wife down in the house;
They are so wicked and cantankerous
They hate what their husbands love," he'd say,
"A woman always casts her shame away
When she casts off her smock," and lo,
"A fair woman unless she's chaste also,
Is like a gold ring in a sow's nose."
Who would think, or who could suppose
The woe, that in my heart was, and pain?
  And when I say he did begin again
Reading of that cursed book all night,
All suddenly three leaves then did I
Pluck from his book, as he read and, weak
As I am, my fist so took him on the cheek
That in our fireplace he fell backward down.
And started up as does a raging lion,
And with his fist he struck me on the head,
That on the floor I lay as I were dead.
And when he saw how still that I lay,
He was aghast, and would have fled away,

Till at last I came to and raised my head.
"Oh, have you slain me, false thief," I said,
"And for my land thus have you murdered me?
Ere I be dead, yet will I kiss thee!"
  And near he came and knelt right down,
And said: "Dear sister, my Alison,
So help me God, I shall thee never smite.
That I have done so was your fault outright;
Forgive me yet, and that I do beseech."
And once again I hit him on the cheek,
And said: "Thief, my vengeance thus I wreak!
Now will I die; I may no longer speak."
But in the end, with care and much ado,
We came to an agreement did we two.
He gave the bridle all into my hand,
To me the governance of house and land,
And of his tongue and of his hand also,
And I made him burn his book of woe.
And when that I had gotten unto me
By mastery all the sovereignty,
And that he said: "Mine own true wife,
Do as you wish through all your term of life;
Guard your honour, and my good estate,"
After that day we had no more debate.
God help me so, I was as kind to him
As any wife from Denmark unto Inde,
And also true, and so was he to me.
I pray to God that sits in majesty,
To bless his soul, of His mercy dear!
Now will I say my tale, if you will hear.'

BEHOLD THE WORDS BETWEEN THE SUMMONER AND FRIAR

he Friar laughed when he had heard all this;
'Now dame,' quoth he, 'so send me joy and bliss,
This is a long preamble to a tale!'
And when the Summoner heard the Friar rail,
'Lo,' quoth the Summoner, 'God's arms two,
A Friar will interfere whatever you do!
Lo, good men, a fly and then a friar
Will fall in every dish and every fire!
What do you mean by your 'preambulation'?
Come, amble, or trot, or sit, or stay in motion!
You're hindering our sport in this manner.'
'You think so, Sir Summoner,' quoth the Friar.
'Now, by my faith, I shall, before I go
Tell of a summoner a tale or so,
That all the folk shall laugh in this place.'
'Now if not, Friar, I will curse your face,'
Quoth the Summoner, 'and then curse me,
If I do not tell a tale or two or three,
Of Friars, ere I come to Sittingborne,
That will make your very heart go mourn,
For well I know your patience is all gone.'
Our Host cried: 'Peace, and that anon!'
And said: 'Let the woman tell her tale.
You bicker like folk full drunk on ale.
Come, dame, tell forth your tale, that will be best.'
'All ready, sir,' quoth she, 'just as you wish,
If I have licence of this worthy Friar.'
'Yes, dame,' quoth he, 'tell forth and I will hear.'

Here ends the Wife of Bath's Prologue and her Tale begins

THE WIFE OF BATH'S TALE

n the olden days of King Arthur,
Of whom Britons speak with great honour,
All this land was filled full with faerie.
The Elf-Queen with her fair company
Danced full oft in many a green mead.
That was the old opinion, as I read –
I speak of many hundred years ago.
But now no man sees elves I know,
For now the endless charity and prayers
Of limiters and other holy friars,
Who search every field and every stream
As thick as are the motes in a sun-beam,
Blessing halls, chambers, kitchens, bowers,
Cities, boroughs, castles and high towers,
Thorps, barns, cattle-sheds, and dairies –
This is why there are no longer faeries.
For wherever there used to walk an elf,
There walks now the limiter himself
In the noon-time and in the mornings,
And says his matins and his holy things
As he goes round his limitation's bounds.
Women may go safely up and down;
In every bush or under every tree,
There is no incubus about but he,
And he will only do them dishonour.
And it so befell that this King Arthur
Had in his house a lusty bachelor
Who one day came riding from the river,
And it chanced that, alone as he was born,
He saw a maiden walking there at dawn,
Of which maid, no matter how she pled,

By very force he stole her maidenhead;
Which oppression raised so great a clamour
And such petitions to King Arthur
That this knight was condemned as dead
Bu court of law and set to lose his head –
Peradventure, such was the statute though –
But that the Queen and other ladies so
Prayed the King for so long for his grace
That he his life granted him in its place,
And gave him to the Queen, to do her will,
To choose whether she would save or kill.
  The Queen thanked the King with all her might;
And after thus she spoke to the knight,
When she thought it right, upon a day,
'You yet stand,' quoth she, 'in such array
That of your life you yet shall have no surety.
I grant you life though, if you can tell me
What thing it is that women most desire.
Beware and keep your neck from axe's ire!
And if you cannot tell me now anon,
Yet I will give you leave to be gone
A twelve-month and a day, and everywhere
Seek answer sufficient to this matter there.
And surety will I have, before you ride a pace,
That you return in person to this place.'
  Woe was this knight, and sorrowfully mired,
But then, he might not do as he desired.
And at the last he chose to go and wend,
And come again, right at the year's end,
With such answer as God would him purvey;
And so took leave and wended on his way.
  He sought at every house in every place
Wherever he had hopes of finding grace,
To learn what thing women love the most;
But could not find by inland field or coast
Any one solution to this matter
On which two creatures agreed together.

Some said women had most love of riches;
Some said honour, some said happiness;
Some rich array, some said lust abed,
And oft times to be widowed and to wed.
Some said that our heart is most eased
When we are flattered most and pleased.
(I cannot lie! He's very near reality;
A man may win us best by flattery;
And with attention, all the business,
Are we best snared, the great and less.)
  And some said that we love best
To be free, and do as we're possessed,
And that no man reprove us of our vice,
But claim we are not fools but somewhat wise.
For truly there is none at all among us,
If anyone on some sore spot will rub us
That will not kick if he tells the truth.
Try, and you will find it so, in sooth.
For, be we ever so vicious within,
We would be held as wise and free of sin.
  And some said that great delight have we
In being thought dependable, discreet,
Steadfastly maintaining our purpose well,
And not betraying things that some might tell –
But value that at less than a rake-handle!
Woman's discretion isn't worth a candle;
Witness old Midas – will you hear the tale?
  Ovid, amongst his great and small ale,
Says Midas had, under his long hair,
Upon his head two ass's ears there;
The which deformity he hid from sight
Of every man, as subtly as he might,
That save his wife, none knew it was so.
He loved her best, and trusted her also;
He begged her that to no creature
She would tell of this sad feature.
  She swore 'no', for all the world to win,

She would not do such villainy and sin,
As to gain her husband so foul a name;
She would not tell she said out of shame.
But nevertheless she almost died
At having this secret so long to hide.
She felt it swell so sore about her heart
That some word was sure from her to start.
And since she dared tell it to no man,
Down the marsh close nearby she ran –
Till she reached it her heart was all afire –
And as a bittern booms in the mire,
She laid her mouth to the water down.
'Betray me not, water, with your sound!'
Quoth she, 'I tell it now, but just to you:
My husband has long ass's ears two!
Now is my heart all whole; now is it out.
I could no longer hide it, have no doubt.'
Here you see, that we can for a time abide,
Yet out it must; we can no secret hide.
The remainder of the tale, if you would hear,
Read Ovid, and you will find it there.
The knight of whom my tale tells specially,
When he saw he could not find out easily –
That is to say, what women love the most –
Within his breast full sorrowful was his ghost.
But home he goes; he could not make sojourn;
The day was come when homeward he must turn.
And on his way back he happened to ride,
Full of his cares, under a forest side,
Where he saw dancing on woodland floor
Of ladies four and twenty, and yet more.
Towards the which dance he began to turn,
In hope that some wisdom he might learn.
But certainly, before he was fully there,
Vanished was the dance; he knew not where.
No creature saw he that showed sign of life,
Save, sitting on the green, an old wife –

A fouler one than her might none devise.
Against the knight this wife began to rise
And said: 'Sir knight, here there lies no way.
Tell me what you are seeking, by your faith!
Peradventure it might be better thus for thee;
This old woman knows many things,' quoth she.
'My dear mother,' quoth the knight, 'for certain
I am a dead man, unless I can show plain
What thing it is that women most desire.
Should you enlighten me, I'd pay your hire.'
'Plight me your troth, here by my hand,' quoth she,
'That the next thing I require of thee
You shall do, if it lies within your might,
And I will tell you of it ere it be night.'
'Here, by my truth!' quoth the knight, 'Agreed.'
'Then,' quoth she, 'I dare boast readily
Your life is safe, for I will stand thereby.
Upon my life, the Queen will speak as I.
Let's see if then the proudest of them all
That wears a head-cloth or a gemmed caul
Dare say nay to that which I shall teach.
Let us go on without longer speech.'
Then she whispered something in his ear,
And bade him to be glad and have no fear.
When they had reached the court, this knight
Declared he had kept his promise, to the night,
And ready was his answer, as he said.
Full many a noble wife and many a maid
And many a widow – since they are wise –
And the Queen herself, sitting in justice high,
Were assembled his answer there to hear;
And in a while the knight was bade appear.
Of everyone demanded was their silence,
And that the knight should tell his audience
What thing that worldly women love the best.
The knight forbore to stand there like a beast,
But to her question swiftly answered her

In manly voice, so all the court could hear.
'My liege lady, generally,' quoth he,
Women desire the self-same sovereignty
Over a husband as they do a lover,
And to hold mastery, he not above her.
That is your great desire, though you me kill;
Do as you wish; I am at your will.'
In all the court there was nor wife nor maid
Nor widow who could challenge what he said,
But said that he was worthy to have his life.
And at that word up started the old wife
Whom the knight had found sitting on the green.
'Mercy, 'quoth she, 'my sovereign lady queen;
Ere that your court depart, see me aright.
I taught this answer to this same knight,
For which he plighted me his troth entire,
That the first thing I should of him require
He would do, if it lay within his might.
Before the court then, pray I you, sir knight,'
Quoth she, 'that you take me as your wife,
For you know well that I have saved your life.
If I say false, say so, upon your faith.'
The knight answered, 'Alas and well-away!
I know right well that such was my behest.
For God's love, now choose a fresh request!
Take all my goods, and let my body go.'
'Nay, then,' quoth she, 'A curse upon us two!
For though that I be foul and old and poor,
I wish not, for all the metal and the ore
That is buried under earth or lies above,
For aught but to be your wife, and your love.'
'My love!' quoth he, 'nay, my damnation!
Alas, that any of my nation
Should ever be disgraced so foully!'
But all for naught; the end is this, that he
Had little choice; he needs must her wed,
And take his old wife, and go to bed.

Now some men would say, peradventure,
That in my negligence I make no feature
Of all the joy there was and the array
That at the feast appeared that very day.
To which thing briefly I answer shall:
I say, there was no joy or feast at all;
There was only heaviness and much sorrow.
For secretly he wedded her that morrow,
And all day after hid him like an owl;
Such woe was on him – with a wife so foul.
Great was the woe the knight had in his thought
When he was with his wife to bed there brought;
He thrashed about and twisted to and fro.
His old wife lay smiling broadly though,
And said: 'O dear husband, *benedicitee*!
Does every knight do with his wife as thee?
Is this the law about King Arthur's house?
Is every knight of his so mean a louse?
I am your own love, and then your wife;
I am she who has saved your life,
And, for sure, I have served you right.
Why do you thus with me this first night?
You act as would a man who'd lost his wit!
What is my sin? For God's love, tell me it,
And it shall be amended, if I may.'
'Amended,' quoth the knight, 'Alas, nay, nay!
It cannot be amended evermore.
You are so ugly, and so old, and more
You come also of such a lowly kin,
That little wonder is I thrash and spin.
God, would the heart but burst in my breast!'
'Is this,' quoth she, 'the cause of your unrest?'
Yes,' quoth he, what wonder all's amiss?'
'Now, sire,' quoth she, 'I could amend all this,
If I wished, before we have seen days three,
If you would but bear yourself well towards me.
If you all think by speaking of nobleness

Such as has descended from old riches,
That therefore it makes you noble men,
Such arrogance is not worth a hen.
Look for the most virtuous man always,
In private and public, who sees his way
To doing the noblest deeds that he can,
There will you find the greatest gentleman.
Christ wills we take from him our gentleness,
Not from our ancestors, despite their riches.
For though they leave us all their heritage,
From which we claim noble parentage,
Yet can they still bequeath us nothing
Not one of us, of their virtuous living,
That made them gentlemen in name to be,
Who bade us follow them in that degree.
  Well has the wise poet of Florence,
Dante, I mean, spoken in this same sense –
Lo, in such verse Dante's tale advances:
"Seldom arises by his slender branches
Man's prowess, for God, of his goodness,
Wills that of him we claim our gentleness."
For from our elders we can nothing claim
But temporal things, which may hurt and maim.
  And everyone knows this as well as me:
If nobility were implanted naturally
In a certain lineage down the line,
Publicly, privately then the vine
Of noble work would be evergreen;
They would enact no vice or villainy.
  Take fire, and bear it to the darkest house
Between here and the distant Caucasus,
And let men shut the doors and return,
Yet will the fire remain there and burn
As if twenty thousand did it behold.
Its natural office it will ever hold,
On peril of my life, until it die.
  Thus you may see how the noble eye

Is not wedded to possession,
Since folk do not maintain its function
Forever, as does fire, lo, of its kind.
For, God knows, men will often find
A lord's son acting shameful villainy.
And he who wants to claim nobility
Because he was born of a noble house,
His ancestors noble and virtuous,
And yet himself has done no noble deeds,
Nor followed his noble ancestors deceased,
He is not noble, be he duke or earl,
For base sinful deeds make the churl.
While mere renown makes gentility,
Your ancestors and their great bounty,
Which is external and not your own;
Your nobility comes from God alone.
Thus comes our own nobility by grace;
Not bequeathed to us by rank and place.
  Think how noble, as says Valerius,
Was that Tullius Hostilius,
Who rose from poverty to high status,
Read Seneca and read Boethius,
There is it both expressed and agreed
That he is noble who does noble deeds.
And therefore, dear husband, I conclude
Although my ancestry is rough and rude,
Yet may God on high, I hope, may He
Grant me the grace to live virtuously.
Thus am I noble, when I first begin
To live in virtue, and abandon sin.
  And in that you my poverty reprove,
The God whom we believe in and love,
In wilful poverty chose to live his life.
And surely, every man, maid or wife
Understands that Jesus, Heaven's King,
Could yield of his life no vicious thing.
Honest poverty is fine, that's certain:

This, Seneca and other clerks maintain.
The man content with poverty, I assert
That man is rich, although he lacks a shirt.
He that covets wealth is all the poorer
For he would have what is not in his power.
But he who has naught, yet does not crave,
Is rich, although you hold him but a knave.
  True poverty sings, in reality.
Juvenal says of poverty appositely:
"The poor man, as he goes on his way
Beside the thief, may ever sing and play."
Poverty though hateful's good nonetheless
In that it is a great release from business;
A great augmenter too of sapience,
To the man accepting it with patience.
Poverty, though it seems second best,
Is a possession no man can contest.
Poverty, often, when a man is humble
Leads him to God, and to himself as well.
Poverty is a glass, it seems to me,
Through which he may his true friends see.
And thus, sire, since I wish no grief to you,
Of my poverty show no more reproof.
  Now, sire, of being old you reprove me;
And certainly, though no authority
Were found in books, yet men of honour
Say that you should show an old man favour,
And call him father, out of courteousness;
And authors too say so, as I would guess.
  Now then you say that I am foul and old,
Well then you need not fear to be cuckold.
For poverty and old age, you must agree,
Are great guardians of chastity.
  Yet nonetheless, since I know your delight,
I shall fulfil your worldly appetite.
Choose now,' quoth she, 'which of these to try:
To see me old and ugly till I die,

And be to you a true and humble wife,
Who never will displease you all my life,
Or else you may have me young and fair,
And take the risk that all those who repair
To our house are there because of me,
And to other places, it well may be.
Now choose, yourself, just as you like.'
  The knight thought deeply and with a sigh
At last he replied to her in this manner:
'My lady and my love, and wife so dear,
I place myself in your wise governance.
Choose yourself which is the most pleasant,
And brings most honour to me and you.
I do not care which it is of the two,
For as you like it, that suffices me.'
  'Then have I won the mastery,' quoth she,
'Since I may choose and govern as I wish?'
'Yes, surely, wife,' quoth he, 'I hold that best.'
  'Kiss me,' quoth she, 'and no more wrath.
For, by my troth, I to you will be both –
That is to say, both fair and good.
I pray to God I shall die mad, and would,
If I be not to you both good and true
As ever wife was, since the world was new.
And if I be not tomorrow as fair to see
As any lady, Empress or Queen may be,
Who lives between the east and the west,
Do what you wish touching my life and death.
Lift the curtain; see what already is.'
  And when the knight swiftly saw all this,
That she was young, and lovely too,
For joy he took her in his arms two.
His heart was bathed in a bath of bliss;
A thousand times in a row they kiss,
And she obeyed him in everything
That pleased him and was to his liking.
  And thus they lived to their lives end

In perfect joy – and Jesus Christ us send
Husbands meek, young, and fresh abed,
And grace to outlive those that we wed.
And also I pray Jesus, trim the lives
Of those who won't be governed by their wives,
Those old and angry, grudging all expense,
God send them soon indeed the pestilence!

The End of the Wife of Bath's Tale

THE FRIAR'S PROLOGUE

THE PROLOGUE TO THE FRIAR'STALE

he worthy Limiter, our noble Friar,
Kept glancing round with a scowl of ire
Towards the Summoner, but from honesty
No villainous word as yet spoke he.
But at last he turned to the Wife:
'Dame,' quoth he, 'God grant you a good life!
You have here touched, I must agree,
On high matters of great difficulty.
You have said many things well, I say.
But, dame, here as we ride by the way,
We are but asked to speak and play a game,
And leave true authority, in God's name,
To the preachers and the schools of clergy.
But if it's pleasing to this company,
I'll tell you of a summoner, the same.
Pardee, you may know just by the name
Of summoner there's no good to be said –
I pray that none of you will be offended.
A summoner runs up and down the nation
With summonses concerning fornication,
Him people thrash at every town's end.'
Our Host then spoke: 'Ah, sire, please extend
Courtesy, as of a man in your estate!
In company we'll have no such debate.
Tell your tale, and let the Summoner be!'
'Nay,' quoth the Summoner, 'let him call me
Whatever he wishes; when I tune my note

By God, I'll repay him every groat!
I'll tell him, then, how great an honour
It is to be a flattering limiter,
And of the many other kinds of crime
That need no rehearsing at this time,
And explain his office to him, as it is!'
  Our Host answered: 'Peace, no more of this!'
And after that he turned to the Friar:
'Tell forth your tale, now, my good sire.'

THE FRIAR'S TALE

HERE BEGINS THE FRIAR'S TALE

nce there was, dwelling in my country,
An archdeacon, a man of high degree,
Who boldly served the law's execution
In the punishment of fornication,
Of witchcraft, and also of bawdry,
Of defamation, and adultery,
Of church robbery, and of testaments
Of contracts, and neglect of sacraments,
Of usury, and of simony also.
But on the lechers he served greatest woe;
He made them sing, if less than innocent,
And small tithe-payers if they missed the rent,
If any parson should of them complain.
They could not avoid pecuniary pain;
For short tithes and short offerings
He made the people piteously sing.
For ere the bishop caught them with his crook,
They were down in the archdeacon's book,
And then had he, through his jurisdiction,
Power to administer correction.
He had a summoner ready to his hand;
A slyer lad was none in all England.
For subtly he set spies on the trail
Who showed him his profit without fail.
He would spare the lechers, three or four,
To lead the way to four and twenty more.
For though our man go mad as a hare,

To tell his wickedness I will not spare;
For we are free from his correction.
Over us they have no jurisdiction,
Nor ever shall, throughout their lives.
'St Peter! Thus the women in the dives,'
Quoth the Summoner, 'are past our cure!'
'Peace to mischance and misadventure!'
– So said our Host – 'and let him tell his tale.
Now tell it forth, though the Summoner pale;
And spare him not, my own good sire.'
This false thief, this summoner – quoth the Friar –
Had pimps always ready to his hand,
As any hawk to lure in all England,
Who told him all the secrets that they knew,
For their acquaintance was nothing new;
They were his private agents, his spies.
He made himself great profits thereby;
His master knew not always what he won.
And without a warrant he would summon
Some lewd man, on pain of Christ's curse,
And all would be content to fill his purse,
And buy him great feasts at the inn.
And just as Judas had his purse, his sin
Being theft, just such a thief was he.
His master received but half the duty.
He was, if I should praise him and applaud,
A thief, and then a summoner, and a bawd.
And he had wenches in his retinue
That, whether Sir Robert or Sir Hugh,
Or Jack or Ralph, whoever might appear
And lie with them, they told it in his ear.
So were the wench and he of one intent.
And he would fetch a forged writ hence,
And summon both to Chapter Court and so
He'd fleece the man and let the wench go.
Then would he say: 'Friend, for you, alack,
I'll strike her name out of our letters black.

You need no more in her cause travail;
I am your friend, in this I may avail.'
Certain he knew of swindles old and new,
More than could be told in a year or two.
For in this world no dog that tracks the bow
Could tell a hurt deer from a whole one so
Well as this summoner could a sly lecher,
Or an adulterer, or yet a lover.
And as that was the bulk of all his rent,
Therefore on that he set his whole intent.
  And so befell it once that on a day,
This summoner, ever waiting on his prey,
Rode to summon an old widow of the tribe,
Feigning a cause, expecting a bribe;
And chanced to see before him on the ride
A merry yeoman under a forest side.
A bow he bore, and arrows bright and keen;
He wore a woollen jacket all in green,
A hat upon his head with fringes black.
  'Sire,' quoth this Summoner, reigning back,
Hail and well met! And every good man more!'
'Whither ride you under this greenwood shaw?'
Said the yeoman: 'Go you far today?'
  The summoner answered him and said: 'Nay;
Here close by,' quoth he, 'it's my intent
To ride, and then to summon up a rent
That is owing there to my lord, you see,'
  'You are a bailiff then?' 'Yes' quoth he.
He dare not, for very stain and shame,
Say that he was a summoner, by name.
'*Depardieux*,' quoth the yeoman, 'dear brother,
You are a bailiff, and I am another.
I am a stranger now to this country;
For your acquaintance I would beg thee,
And brotherhood as well, if you wish.
I have gold and silver in my chest;
If you chance to cross into our shire,

All shall be yours, as much as you desire.'
'*Graunt mercy*,' quoth the summoner, 'by my faith!'
Each on the other's hand his truth pledged
To be brothers sworn till their dying day,
And rode chatting pleasantly on their way.
The summoner, who was as full of words
As full of venom are the butcher-birds,
And ever enquiring about everything,
'Brother,' quoth he, 'where is your dwelling,
If I were to seek you out another day?
The yeoman answered in his soft-spoken way:
'Brother,' quoth he, 'far in the north country,
Where I hope some time you'll visit me.
Ere we part, I'll tell you where it is,
So my house there you shall never miss.'
'Now brother,' quoth the summoner, 'I pray,
Tell me, while we are riding on our way –
Since you are a bailiff the same as me –
Some subtle trick, and tell me faithfully
In my office how I may most win;
And spare not for conscience or for sin,
But as my brother tell me how do ye.'
'Now my by troth, dear brother,' said he,
'I will tell you then a faithful tale:
My wages are scanty, right small ale,
My lord is hard to me, ungenerous,
And my office is thus laborious,
And therefore by extortion do I live;
Forsooth, I take whatever men will give.
Any way, by tricks or violence,
From year to year I cover my expense.
I can no better tell it, truthfully.'
'Well, now,' quoth the summoner, 'same as me!'
I never hesitate to take, God knows,
Long as it's not too hot or heavy though.
What I may get in private, secretly,
Is not a question of conscience, to me.

Were it not for extortion, I'd no living.
Nor of such tricks shall I be shriven;
Feeling or conscience know I none.
I curse those confessors ever a one!
Well are we met, by God and by Saint James!
But, dear brother, tell me then your name.'
Quoth the summoner. Now, all the while
The yeoman had displayed a little smile.
'Brother,' quoth he, 'would you have me tell?
I am a fiend; my dwelling is in Hell.
And here I ride about my purchasing
To see if men will give me anything.
My profit is the total, just like rent.
Look how you ride upon the same intent,
To win your profit – you don't care how –
Well so fare I, for ride I would right now
Unto the world's end following my prey.'
'Ah,' quoth the summoner, '*benedicite*!
What's this? I thought you were a yeoman, truly;
You have a man's shape as well as me.
Have you another shape determinate
In Hell, where you are in your own true state?
'Nay, for sure,' quoth he, 'there have we none.
But when we choose, then we can don one,
Or else make you believe we have a shape.
Sometimes we're like a man, or like an ape,
Or like an angel can I ride and go.
It is no wondrous thing though it be so;
A louse-ridden juggler can deceive thee,
And, pardee, I've much more power than he.'
'Why,' quoth the summoner, 'do you ride and run
In sundry shape, and not always in one?'
'That we,' quoth he, 'may such forms awake
As are most useful when our prey we take.'
'What makes you undertake all this labour?'
'Many a reason, dear sir summoner,'
Said the fiend, 'but all things in good time.

The day is short, and it is long past prime,
And yet I've gathered nothing all this day.
I must attend to profit if I may,
And our stratagems I'll not declare;
For, brother mine, your wit is all too bare
To understand, though I should tell them thee.
But as you asked why so labour we:
Sometimes we are God's own instruments,
The means to execute his commandments,
When he wishes to, upon his creatures,
In various ways and under various features.
Without him we have no power, again,
If he should wish to stand against our aim.
And sometimes at our request we have leave
Only the body, but not the soul, to grieve;
Witness Job, whom we brought such woe.
But sometimes we have power over both:
That is to say of body and soul also.
And sometimes we are allowed to go
Attack a man, and bring his soul unrest,
And not his body, then all is for the best
If he withstands our sore temptation;
Since it is a cause of his salvation,
Albeit that such was never our intent
To save, but rather to have him pent.
And sometimes we are servants to some man,
As to the archbishop Saint Dunstan;
To the Apostles a servant once was I.'
'Then tell me,' quoth the summoner, 'speak no lie,
Make you your new bodies thus always
From the elements?' The fiend answered: 'Nay.
Sometimes we're illusions, sometimes rise
With corpses' bodies in sundry wise,
And speak as fluently and fair and well
As, to the Witch of Endor, Samuel.
(And yet some men say it was not he –
I grant no worth to your theology.)

But one thing I warn you of, it's no jape:
You'll know one day how we find a shape;
You shall hereafter, my brother dear,
Come where you need not lend an ear!
For you will, from your own experience,
Be able to lecture in word and sentence
Better than Virgil when he was alive,
Or Dante. Now let us swiftly ride,
For I will keep company with thee,
Till you may choose to forsake me.'
'Nay,' quoth the summoner, 'let us ride!
I'm a yeoman known both far and wide;
My pledge will I keep, as I have done.
For though you were the devil himself, Satan,
My pledge will I keep to you, my brother,
As I swore, and each swore to the other,
To be a true brother in every case.
And both can go about our purchase;
Take you your share of what men will give,
And I will mine; thus we both may live.
And if either has more than the other,
Let him be true, and share with his brother.'
'Agreed,' quoth the devil, 'by my faith!'
And with that they rode forth on their way,
And right at the start of the town end
To which this summoner planned to wend,
They saw a cart loaded up with hay,
That a carter drove forth on his way.
Deep was the mud, and the cart was stuck;
The carter shouted out like mad, and struck:
'Hey Brock! Hup, Scot! Mind you the stones?
The fiend,' quoth he, 'take you, skin and bones,
As surely as ever that you were foaled,
So much is the woe you bring, all told!
The devil take all, horse, cart and hay!'
The summoner said: 'Here's good play!'
And as if naught were doing, he drew near,

And quietly whispered in his friend's ear:
'Hearken, my brother, hearken, by my faith!
Do you not hear what the carter says?
Take them anon, for he has given them thee,
Hay and cart, and also his horses three.'
'Nay,' quoth the devil, 'God knows, never a bit!
Trust me well, he's never a wish for it.
Ask him yourself, if you trust not me,
Or else wait a while and you will see.'
The carter struck his horses on the rump,
And they began to haul, as he thumped.
'Gee up,' quoth he, 'and Jesus Christ bless,
You and all his handiwork, both great and less!
That was well pulled, my own Grey Boy!
I pray God save you, and His Saint Loy.
Now is my cart out of the slough, pardee!'
'Lo, brother,' quoth the fiend, 'what told I thee?
Here you may see, my own dear brother,
The man spoke one thing, but meant another.
Les us sally forth on our voyage;
Here I win nothing, goods or carriage.'
When they were some way out of town,
The summoner softly began to sound:
'Brother,' quoth he, 'here lives an old wreck,
Who would almost as soon lose her neck
As give you a pennyworth of what she has.
I'll have twelve pence of her, though she wax mad,
Or I'll have to summon her to our office –
And yet, God knows, of her I know no vice.
But since you have failed in this country
To gain a profit, well then, learn from me.'
The summoner knocked at the widow's gate.
'Come out,' quoth he, 'you old reprobate!
I swear you've some friar or priest with thee.'
'Who's knocking?' cried the wife, '*benedicitee!*
God save you, sire; what is your good will?'
'I have,' quoth he, 'with me a summons-bill.

On pain of excommunication, you shall be
To-morrow at the arch-deacon's knee
To answer in his court to certain things.'
'Now, Lord,' quoth she, 'Christ Jesus, King of Kings,
Help me, for sure, as only You may!
I have been sick, and that for many a day;
I cannot go so far,' quoth she,' nor ride,
Except I die, it pricks so in my side.
May I not have a writ, sir summoner,
And answer there yet through my lawyer
To such charges as men press against me?'
'Yes,' quoth the summoner, 'pay – let's see –
Twelve pence to me, and I may you acquit.
I shall not profit by it, not a bit.
My master takes the profit, none to me.
Quick now, I must ride on and hurriedly;
Give me twelve pence, for I cannot tarry.'
'Twelve pence!' quoth she, 'Now Lady Saint Mary
Defend me surely from care and sin,
Though this whole wide world I might win,
I have not twelve pence for hand to hold.
You well know that I am poor and old;
Show charity to me, a poor wretch.'
'Nay, then,' quoth he, 'the devil may me fetch,
If I'll excuse you, though you go to ruin!'
'Alas!' quoth she, 'God knows, I have no coin!'
'Pay me,' quoth he, 'by the sweet Saint Anne,
Or I will carry off your brand new pan
Against the debt you owe to me of old,
When you made your husband cuckold;
I paid back home for your correction.'
'You lie!' quoth she, 'By my salvation,
I was never ere now, widow or wife,
Summoned to your court in all my life,
Nor never was I with my body untrue.
To the devil rough and black of hue
Give I your body, and my pan also!'

And when the devil heard her cursing so
Upon her knees, he spoke in this manner:
'Now, Mabel, my own mother dear,
Is this your wish in earnest that you say?'
'The devil, quoth she, 'come fetch him today,
And pan and all, unless he shall repent!'
'Nay, old bawd, that is not my intent,'
Quoth the summoner, 'to repent, not me,
For anything that I have had of thee.
I would I had your smock, rag and cloth!'
'Now, brother,' quoth the devil, 'be not wrath:
Your body and this pan are mine by right.
You yet shall go to Hell with me tonight,
Where you shall know of our mysteries
More than does any master of divinity.'
And with that the foul fiend dragged him hence;
Body and soul he with the devil went
Where summoners receive their heritage.
And God who made, after His own image,
Mankind, save and guide us, all and some,
And let these summoners good men become!
Lordings, I could have told you – said the Friar –
Had I the time, and this Summoner desire,
Drawing on texts of Christ, Paul and John,
And of other teachers, many a one,
Of torments that will freeze hearts, in some wise;
Although the tongue can scarcely devise,
Though for a thousand winters I might tell
Of it, the pain of this cursed house of Hell.
But to defend us from that cursed place,
Watch and pray to Jesus for his grace;
So guard us from the tempter Satan base.
Hark to my word – beware, as in this case:
'The lion sits in wait for us always
To slay the innocent, if ever he may.
Dispose your hearts always to withstand
The fiend, who would grip you in his hand.'

He may not tempt you beyond your might,
For Christ will be your champion and knight.
And pray that all these summoners repent
Of their misdeeds, before they're summoned hence!

Here ends the Friar's Tale

THE SUMMONER'S PROLOGUE

THE PROLOGUE TO THE SUMMONER'S TALE

he Summoner, up in his stirrups high, stood;
His heart against this Friar filled with blood
And like an aspen leaf he shook, with ire.
'Lordings,' quoth he, 'but one thing I desire:
I beseech you that of your courtesy, I,
Since you have heard this false Friar lie,
May be suffered now my tale to tell!
This Friar boasts that he knows of Hell,
And God knows, that is little wonder;
Friars and fiends are seldom far asunder.
For, pardee, you often times heard tell
How that a friar was dragged off to Hell
In the spirit once, and in a vision,
And as an angel led him up and down
To show him all the torments of the fire,
In all the place he never saw a Friar;
Of other folk he saw enough, in woe.
Unto the angel spoke the Friar, though:
"Now sire, 'quoth he, 'are Friars in such grace,
That none of them shall ever reach this place?"
"Nay," quoth the angel, "millions are found
Below! And unto Satan he led him down.
"Now Satan you see" says he, "has a tail
Wider than of a carrack is the sail.
Hols up your tail, now Satan!" quoth he,
"Show us your arse, and let the Friar see
Where is the nest for Friars in this place."

And in less than half a minute's space,
Just as bees swarm from out a hive,
Out of the devil's arse began to drive
Twenty thousand Friars in a rout,
And off through Hell they swarmed about,
And returned again as fast as they had gone
And into his arse they crept everyone;
He clapped his tail again and lay still.
The Friar, when he had looked his fill
On all the torments in this sorry place,
His spirit God restored, of his grace,
To his body again, and he awoke.
But nevertheless for fear he still shook,
The devil's arse was there yet in his mind;
Such is the heritage of all his kind.
God save you all, save this cursed Friar!
My prologue ends, all that I shall require.'

The Summoner's Tale

Here begins the Summoner's Tale

ordings there lies, in Yorkshire as I guess,
A marshy country known as Holderness,
In which a friar, a limiter, went about
To preach, and to beg as well, no doubt.
And it befell that on a day this friar
He preached at a church as he desired,
And specially, above every other thing,
Excited all the people by his preaching
To buy masses, and give for God's sake
Coins with which men might holy houses make,
Those where divine service is honoured –
Not where it is wasted and devoured,
Nor where there's no need for men to give,
As to endowed clergymen, who live,
Thanks be to God, in wealth and abundance!
'Masses,' said he, 'deliver from all penance
Your friends' souls, whether old or young,
Yes, even when they are quickly sung –
Not to say that a priest has gone astray;
Because he only sings one mass a day.
'Deliver then, anon' quoth he, 'the souls!
Full hard it is with flesh-hooks and with awls
To be clawed, or yet to burn or bake.
Do it swiftly now, for Christ's sake!'
And when the Friar had shown his intent,
With *qui cum patre* on his way he went.
When folk in church had given him what he wished,

He went his way – no longer would he rest –
With scrip and pointed staff, his gown tucked high.
Into every house he'd begin to peer and pry,
And begged for meal and cheese, or else corn.
His comrade had a staff, tipped with horn,
A pair of writing-tables, in ivory,
And a stylus, polished all elegantly,
And wrote the names down, as he stood,
Of all the folk that gave him any food,
As if for them he'd pray, by and by.
'Give us a bushel, wheat, malt, or rye,
A God's cake, or a little piece of cheese,
Anything you wish; all things do please.
A God's halfpenny, or a mass-penny,
Or give us of your brawn, if you have any;
A portion of your blanket, dear dame,
Our sister true – lo, here I write your name –
Bacon or beef, or anything you find.'
A sturdy varlet followed them behind,
Who was their inn-servant, and bore a sack,
And what men gave them, carried on his back;
And when he was out of doors, and alone,
He'd scrape away the names, every one
That he had written on his writing-tables;
He served them all with faery-tales and fables.
'Nay, there you lie, you Summoner!' quoth the Friar.
'Peace!' quoth our Host, 'for Christ's mother dear!
Tell us your tale, and spare us not at all.'
'So thrive I,' quoth the Summoner, 'that I shall.
So along he goes from house to house, till he
Comes to a house where he is wont to be
Refreshed better than a hundred other places.
The good man lies sick whose house it is.
Bedridden there on a low couch lay he.
'*Deus hic*!' quoth he, 'O Thomas, friend, good day!'
Said this friar courteously and full soft.
'Thomas,' quoth he, 'God guard you, full oft

Have I upon this bench eaten full well!
Here have I eaten many a merry meal.'
And from the bench he drove away the cat,
And laid down his pointed staff and hat,
And his scrip too, and sat him quietly down.
His comrade had walked off into town,
Together with his knave, to the hostelry
Where he had thought that night to sleep.
'O my dear master, 'quoth the sick man,
'How are things with you? Since March began
I've not seen you for a fortnight or more.'
'God knows,' quoth he, 'I've laboured full sore,
And especially for your salvation
Have I said many a precious orison,
And for our other friends, God them bless!
I have today been at your church at Mass,
And given a sermon, used my simple wit –
Not using all the text of holy writ,
Since it's too hard for you, as I suppose,
And therefore I paraphrase, for those
Who find it so, it's fine to paraphrase,
For "the letter killeth", as the Bible says.
In it I told them to be charitable,
And spend their coin, in manner reasonable;
And there I saw your dame – ah, where is she?'
'Yonder in the yard I think she'll be.'
Said the man, 'and she'll be here anon.'
'Ey, master, welcome be ye, by Saint John!'
Said the wife: 'How fair you, heartily?'
The friar rose full of courtesy,
And embraced her in his arms narrow,
And kissed her sweet and chirped like a sparrow
With his lips. 'Dame,' quoth he, 'right well,
As he that is your servant and ever shall
Thank God that gave you soul and life!
Yet saw I not today as fair a wife
In all the church about, God save me!'

'Yet God amend my faults, sire,' quoth she.
'You are welcome at any rate, by my faith!'
'*Graunt mercy*, dame, this have I found always.
But in your great goodness, by your leave,
I pray take no offence, and do not grieve,
If I must speak with Thomas a while though.
These curates are full negligent and slow
At groping tenderly after the conscience.
In shriving, preaching, is my diligence,
And studying of Peter's words and Paul's.
I walk and fish for Christian men's souls,
To yield to Jesus Christ his proper rent;
To spread his word is all my true intent.'
'Now, by your leave, O dear sire,' quoth she,
'Scold him well, by the sacred Trinity!
He's irritable as an ant beside the fire,
Though he has all that he could desire.
Though I cover him at night and keep him warm,
And over him lay my leg or my arm,
He groans like the boar that's in our sty.
Other sport of him right none have I;
I may not please him any way, alas.'
'O Thomas, *je vous dy*, Thomas, Thomas!
This is the fiend's work, and must be mended!
Anger's a thing that cannot be defended,
And therefore will I say a word or so.'
'Now, master,' quoth the wife, 'ere I go,
What will you dine on? And then I'll do it.'
'Now dame,' quoth he, 'now *je vous dy sanz doute*,
Had I of a capon but the liver,
And of your soft bread just a sliver,
And after that a roasted pig's head –
Though just for me I'd wish no creature dead –
Then that would be homely munificence.
I am a man needs little sustenance;
My spirit gets its nourishment from the Bible.
The body is so zealous, always so liable

To pray and wake, my appetite is destroyed.
I pray you dame, be not too annoyed,
If I speak frankly and confide in you.
By God, I tell such only to a few!'
'Now, sire,' quoth she, 'one word before I go:
My child died scarcely two weeks ago,
Shortly after you had left the town.'
'His death I saw in a revelation,'
Said the friar, 'at home it was in our
Dormitory, I'd say, not half an hour
After his death, I saw him born to bliss
In a vision, God send me not amiss!
So did our sexton and our infirmary friars,
That have been true men these fifty years;
They may now, God be thanked for His loan,
Make their jubilee, and be free to walk alone.
And up I rose and all our convent meek,
With many a tear trickling down my cheek,
Without a noise or clattering of bells.
Te deum was our song, and nothing else,
Save that to Christ I said an orison,
Thanking Him for His revelation.
For, sire and dame, trust to me right well,
Our orisons are more effectual,
We see more into Christ's secret things
Than laymen do, even though they be kings.
We live in poverty and abstinence,
While laymen live in luxury, expense
On meat and drink, and in their foul delight.
We set this world's lust beyond our sight.
Lazarus and Dives lived diversely,
And they were rewarded differently.
Whoso will pray must fast and be clean,
And feed his soul, but keep his body lean.
We fare as the Gospel says: clothes and food
Suffice for us, though they be coarse and rude.
The cleanliness and fasting of us friars

Is what makes Jesus Christ accept our prayers.
  Lo, Moses forty days and forty nights
Fasted, before the great God in his might
Spoke with him on the summit of Sinai;
With empty stomach, fasting fit to die,
He received the law that was written
By God's finger; and Elijah, when
On Mount Horeb, before he had speech
With God Almighty, who acts as our leech
Healing us, fasted long, in contemplation.
  Aaron too, that had the regulation
Of the Temple, and Levites every one,
Into the Temple when they were gone
To pray for the people, and serve there,
They would take no drink, that is, no manner
Of drink which might them drunken make,
But there in abstinence would pray and wake,
Lest they die. Take heed then of what I say:
Unless they are sober who for people pray,
Beware what I say; enough, that suffices!
  'Our Lord Jesus, as holy writ advises,
Is our example, in fasting and in prayers.
Therefore we mendicants, we simple friars,
Have wedded poverty and continence,
Charity, humility, and abstinence,
Persecution for our righteousness,
Weeping, charity, and cleanliness.
And therefore you can see that our prayers –
I speak of us, we mendicants, we friars –
Are to the high God more acceptable
Than yours, with your feasting at table.
For his gluttony, and I tell no lies,
Man was first driven from Paradise,
And man was chaste in Paradise, for sure.
  'But hearken now, Thomas, I say more:
– I have no text of what I wish to say
But I shall seek it in a paraphrase –

For especially our sweet lord Jesus
Spoke of the friars, when he said thus:
"Blessed be those who poor in spirit be."
And so in all the Gospel you may see,
Whether it is more like to our profession,
Or theirs who swim in riches and possessions.
Fie on their pomp, and their gluttony! Fie,
And as for sinfulness, I them defy.
  I liken them to that Jovinian,
Fat as a whale, and waddling like a swan,
As full of wine as a bottle, what's the sense
In their saying prayers full of reverence,
And chanting for souls the Psalm of David:
"Lo, burp!" they sing, "*cor meum eructavit!*"
Who follows Christ' gospel and his spoor,
But we the humble, the chaste and poor,
Workers of God's word, not its auditors?
Therefore, right as a hawk that upward soars
Springs up into the air, right so the prayers
Of charitable, chaste and busy friars
Soar upwards towards God's ears two.
Thomas, Thomas, as I live, say I too,
By that lord who is named Saint Ives,
Who's not our brother, as you are, never thrives.
In our Chapter pray we day and night,
To Christ, that he send you health and might
To give you use of your body speedily.'
  'God knows, quoth he, 'none of it I feel!
So help me Christ, in but a few years
I have spent on every manner of friars
Full many a pound, yet never the better.
Indeed, it's almost left me now a debtor;
Farewell my gold, it is gone long ago!'
  The Friar answered: 'O Thomas, say you so?
What needed you those various friars seek?
What need has he who has a perfect leech
To go seeking other leeches round the town?

Your inconstancy shall bring you down!
Do you maintain that my, or else our convent's,
Prayers for you have been insufficient?
Thomas, that raillery's not worth a fiddle!
Your malady's because we prayed too little.
Ah, give that convent half a quarter of oats!
Ah, give that convent four and twenty groats!
Ah, give that friar a penny and let him go!
Nay, nay, Thomas, it should not be so!
What is a farthing worth that's cut in twelve?
Lo, each thing that's united in itself
Is stronger than when it's widely scattered.
Thomas, by me you shall not be flattered:
You would have all our labour for naught.
The great God, who all this world has wrought,
Says that the workman's worthy of his hire.
Thomas, naught of your treasure I desire,
For myself, but only that our convent
Should pray for you and be diligent,
And for to build Christ's own church.
Thomas if you would learn to do good works,
You may find if building, for your sin,
Is good, in the life of Thomas Saint of Inde.
You lie here full of anger and of ire
With which the devil sets your heart afire,
And chide here this foolish innocent
Your wife, who is so meek and so patient.
And therefore Thomas – believe me as you wish –
Strive not with your wife: that's for the best.
And bear this word away now, by your faith,
Touching all this – hear, what the wise say:
"Within your house act not like a lion;
Against your household raise no oppression,
Nor serve to make your acquaintance flee."
And Thomas, a second time I charge thee:
Beware of her that in your bosom sleeps!
Beware the serpent that so slyly creeps

Below the grass, and stings with subtlety.
Beware, my son, and listen patiently,
For twenty thousand men have lost their lives
In striving with their lovers and their wives.
Now since you have so holy and meek a wife,
What need have you, Thomas, to make strife?
Truly there is no serpent half so cruel
When man treads on his tail, or half so fell,
As woman is when she is full of fire,
Vengeance then is all that they desire.
Anger is sin, one of the deadly seven,
Abominable to the great God of Heaven,
And to the man himself it is destruction.
This every illiterate vicar or parson
Can tell you, ire engenders homicide.
Ire is, in truth, the executor of pride.
I could of ire tell you so much sorrow
My tale should last until tomorrow;
And therefore I pray God, both day and night,
God send the angry man no power or might!
It does great harm, and brings great misery,
To yield a wrathful man the mastery.
'One there was a wrathful potentate,
Seneca says, and while he ruled the state,
One fine day out rode there knights two.
And as Fortune willed, as she will do,
One of them came home, the other not.
Anon the knight before the judge was brought,
Who said thus: "You have your fellow slain,
For which I sentence you to death, again."
And to another knight commanded he:
"Go, lead him to his death, I order thee."
And so it came to pass as they went by
Towards the place where he should die,
The knight appeared whom men thought dead.
Then it seemed best that both be led
Straight back, returned to the judge again.

They said: "Lord, the knight has not slain
His fellow; here he stands, whole alive."
"You shall die," quoth he, "as I thrive!
That is to say, one and two and three."
And to the first knight thus right spoke he:
"I condemned you; and you shall be dead.
And you, his fellow, also lose your head,
For you are the reason why this man must die."
And on the third knight he cast his eye:
"You have not done as I commanded thee" –
And thus he had the knights slain, all three.
Wrathful Cambyses was a drunkard too,
And loved to be a villain through and through.
And it so befell a lord of his company,
Who valued virtuous morality,
Said one day in private speech right thus:
"A lord is lost if he is vicious,
And drunkenness is foul to record
Of any man, especially a lord.
There is full many an eye and many an ear
Near to a lord, of which he's not aware.
For God's love, drink more temperately!
Wine makes man lose most wretchedly
His mind, and his limbs' use, every one."
"The reverse,' quoth the King, "you'll see anon,
And prove it by your own experience,
That wine does to folk no such offence.
There is no wine shall rob me of my might
In hand or foot, nor of my own eyesight."
And at that he drank as much and more
A hundredfold as he had done before.
And right anon this wrathful cursed wretch
Had this knight's son before him fetched,
Commanding that before him he should stand,
And suddenly he took his bow in hand,
And pulled the string taut towards his ear,
And with an arrow slew the child right there.

"Now do I have a steady hand, or none?"
Quoth he. "Is all my mind and power gone?
Has wine deprived me of my eyesight?"
  What answer was there for the sorry knight?
His son was slain; there is no more to say.
Beware, therefore, with lords how you play.
Sing: "*Placebo*", and "I shall if I can",
Unless it be to some poor old man.
To a poor man men should his vices tell,
But not to a lord, though on his way to Hell.
  Behold, wrathful Cyrus, the Persian,
Who brought the river Gindes to ruin,
Because a horse of his was drowned therein,
When that he went for Babylon to win.
He ensured the river was left so narrow,
That women might wade across its shallows.
Lo, what Solomon taught, as none can:
"Be not the fellow to a wrathful man,
Nor with an angry man walk by the way
Lest you repent of it; that is all I say."
  Now, Thomas, dear brother, cease your anger.
You'll find me true as is a joiner's square.
Hold not the devil's knife towards your heart –
Your anger causes you a bitter smart –
But make to me your whole confession.'
  'Nay,' quoth the sick man, 'by Saint Simon,
I've been shriven today by my curate.
I have told him of my whole estate;
There's no more need to speak of it, said he,
Unless I wish, out of humility.'
  'Give me of your gold then for our cloister,'
Quoth he, 'for many a mussel and many an oyster,
When others have eaten well, many a day,
Have been our food, our cloister for to raise.
And yet, God knows, the bare foundation
Nor yet our pavement, is scarcely done
There's not a tile yet been laid,' he groans,

'By God, we still owe forty pounds for stones!
Now help, Thomas, for Him that harrowed Hell,
Or else must we our books go and sell.
And if you lacked our true instruction,
Then goes the world to its destruction.
For who would this world of us bereave,
So God me save, Thomas, by your leave,
He would bereave this world of the sun.
For who can teach and work as we can?
And have, for no little time,' quoth he,
'For since Elijah, and Elisha, we,
The friars, have, as the books record,
Done charity, and thanks be to our Lord!
Now, Thomas, help, for holy charity!'
And down anon he went on bended knee.
 The sick man was well nigh mad with ire;
He wished the friar might be set afire,
With his falsehood and dissimulation.
'Such as I have in my possession'
Quoth he, 'that may I give, I have no other.
Did you say to me I am your brother?'
 'Yes, certainly,' the friar said, 'trust me;
I gave your dame a letter with our seal.'
 'Well now,' quoth he, 'something I shall give
Unto your holy convent while I live.
And in your hand have it you shall anon –
On this and on no other condition:
That you share it out, my dear brother,
So each friar has as much as every other.
This shall you swear, on your profession,
Without fraud or equivocation.'
 'I swear it,' quoth the friar, 'on my faith!'
And with that his hand in his he laid.
'Lo here's my faith, in me you'll find no lack.'
 'Now then, put your hand down behind my back,'
Said the man, 'and grope around behind,
Beneath my buttocks; there you will find

A thing that I have hidden secretly.'
'Ah!' thought the friar, 'that will do for me!'
And down his hand he sank to the cleft,
In hopes of finding there a little gift.
And when the sick man felt the friar
Groping round his arse, here and there,
Into the friar's hand he let fall a fart.
There was no dray-horse pulling on a cart
That could have farted with a louder sound.
The friar started up like an angry lion.
'Ah, false churl!' quoth he, 'by God's bones,
This was done for spite!' The friar moans:
'You'll pay dearly for that fart, some day!'
The servants, who heard the whole affray,
Came leaping in and chased him from the place,
And off he went with a full angry face,
And fetched his comrade and all his store
Of goods, and fierce as champs a wild boar,
He ground his teeth, so great was his wrath.
At a swift pace to the manor he strode off,
Where there lived a man of great honour,
To whom he had ever been his confessor;
This worthy man was lord of the village.
The friar came there in a blinding rage
Where the lord sat eating at his board.
The friar could hardly utter a word,
Till at last he said, 'God be with thee!'
The lord looked up, and said, '*Benedicitee!*
What, Friar John, what in the world is this?
I can see that something's well amiss.
You look as if the wood was full of thieves!
Sit down anon, and tell me now what grieves,
And it shall be amended, if I may.'
'I have,' quoth he, 'received insult today,
God keep you, down there in your village,
Such that there's never so lowly a page
But that he would find it an abomination

That which I have received in your town.
And yet nothing grieves me so sore
As that this old churl with locks hoar,
Has blasphemed our holy convent too.'
'Now master,' quoth the lord, 'I beseech you –'
'Not master,' quoth he, 'but your servitor!
Though the schools have done me that honour,
God wishes not that "*Rabbi*" men should call,
Us, in the market-place, or your great hall.'
'No matter,' quoth he, 'but tell me all your grief.'
'Sir,' quoth the friar, 'an odious mischief
This day befell my order and me,
And so, *per consequens*, each degree
Of Holy Church, may God amend it soon!'
'Sire,' quoth the lord, 'you know what must be done.
Never upset yourself, you are my confessor.
You are the salt of the earth and the savour;
For God's love, keep patience and unfold
Your grief to me.' And he anon him told
What you have heard before – you know what.
The lady of the house all quietly sat
Till she had heard all that the friar said.
'Ey, God's mother,' quoth she, 'blessed maid!
Is there aught else? Tell me faithfully.'
'Madame,' quoth he, 'what do you think, say free?'
'What do I think?' quoth she, 'So God me speed,
I say a churl has done a churl's deed.
What should I say? God help such as he!
His sick head is so full of vanity.
I swear he's in a frenzy of some kind.'
'Madame,' quoth he, 'by God, I shall find
Some means on him vengeance to wreak,
I shall slander him wherever I speak,
The false blasphemer that charged me
With sharing where sharing cannot be,
With each man alike, curse his ignorance!'
The lord sat still as he were in a trance,

And in his thought he rolled up and down:
'How had this churl the imagination
To set such a problem for the friar?
Never before has ear heard such a matter;
I swear the devil put it in his mind!
In arithmetic no man could find
Before this day such a subtle question.
Who could enact a demonstration
Where every man should have his part
Of the sound and savour of a fart?
O foolish proud churl, I curse his face!
Lo sires,' quoth the lord, 'in bad grace,
Who ever heard of such a thing till now?
To every man alike – well tell me how!
It is impossible, it may not be.
Ey, foolish churl, God never prosper thee!
The rumbling of a fart, and every sound,
Is only air reverberating round,
And ever it wastes, bit by bit, away.
There is no man can judge, by my faith,
Whether it has been shared out equally.
What, lo my churl, lo yet how shrewdly
To my confessor today he answered back!
I hold him sure to be a demoniac.
Now eat your meat, and let the churl go play;
Let him go hang himself, and devil away!'

The words of the lord's squire and his carver for sharing the fart between twelve

ow stood the lord's squire at the board,
Who carved his meat, and heard every word
Of all the thing I've told you, which is true.
'My lord,' quoth he, 'and not to displease you,
But I could tell, for a gown's worth of cloth,
To you, sir friar, as long as you be not wrath,
How this fart might be divided equally
Among your convent, if it was up to me.'
'Tell,' quoth the lord, 'and thou shall have anon
A gown's worth, by God and by Saint John!'
'My lord,' quoth he, 'when the weather's fair,
Without wind or perturbation of the air,
Let them bring a cartwheel here into the hall.
But look that it have its spokes, one and all –
Twelve spokes has a cartwheel generally.
And bring me then twelve friars – why? You'll see.
For thirteen make a convent, I would guess.
Your confessor here, for his worthiness,
Shall make up the number of this convent.
Then shall they kneel down, with their assent,
And to every spoke's end in this manner
Full firmly lay his nose there shall a friar.
Your noble confessor, may God him save,
Shall hold his nose up right beneath the nave.
Then the churl, with belly stiff and taut,
As any drum, hither he shall be brought,
And set upon the wheel of the cart,
Upon the nave, the hub, and let him fart.
And you shall see, on peril of my head,

By proof demonstrative, as I have said,
That equally the sound of it will wend,
Just as the stink, to the spokes' far end.
Save that this worthy man, your confessor,
Because he is a man of great honour,
Shall have the first fruit, as right it is.
The noble custom friars keep is this,
The worthiest of them shall first be served,
And certainly he has it well deserved.
He has taught us today so much good,
Preaching in the pulpit where he stood,
That I shall grant him, if it's up to me,
The first smell of every fart, say three.
And so would all his convent, certainly;
He bears himself so fair and holily.'
The lord, the lady, and all save the friar,
Said that Jankin's answer rated higher
Than any man's but Euclid and Ptolemy.
As for the churl, they said that subtlety
And great wit made him answer back
In such a way, he was no demoniac.
And Jankin has won himself a new gown.
My tale is done; we're almost in the town.

Here ends the Summoner's Tale

THE CLERK'S PROLOGUE

THE PROLOGUE TO THE CLERK OF OXFORD'S TALE

'Sir Clerk of Oxford town,' our Host said,
'You ride as coy and quiet as a maid
Just newly wed, and sitting at the board.
From your tongue I haven't heard a word;
Perhaps you're pondering reason and rhyme.
But Solomon says "each thing has its time".
  For God's sake, be now of better cheer!
The time for study is not now and here.
Tell us some merry tale, in God's name;
For when a man has entered on a game,
He needs must to the game itself assent.
But preach not though, as friars do in Lent,
To make us for our past sins to weep,
Nor tell a tale that sends us all to sleep.
  Tell us some merry thing of your adventures!
Your rhetoric, your flourishes, your figures,
Keep them in store until you come to write
In the high style, as men to monarchs might.
Speak out plainly at this time, we pray,
So we can understand all that you say.'
  The worthy clerk answered him benignly:
'Host,' quoth he, 'you hold authority,
For now you have of us the governance,
And therefore will I show obedience,
As far as reason goes, assuredly.
I will tell you a tale from Italy
I learned at Padua from a worthy clerk,

As proved by both his words and his work.
He is dead now, and nailed up in his chest;
I pray to God to grant his spirit rest!
  Francis Petrarch, the laureate poet,
This clerk was called, whose rhetoric sweet
Illumined all Italy with poetry
As Lignano did in philosophy,
And law, and other art particular.
But death, that will allow no lingering here
As it were in the twinkling of an eye,
Has slain them both, as we all shall die.
  But to tell briefly of the learned man
That taught me this tale, as I began
I say that first his style climbs the heights,
Before the body of his tale he writes,
A preface in which described we see
Piedmont, and Saluzzo, in that country,
And then the Apennines, hill scenery
That sets the bounds to western Lombardy,
And Viso, especially, the mountain
Where the Po from a little fountain
Springs, and from which it takes its source,
That eastward flows swelling in its course
To Emilia, Ferrara, and Venice,
Which would be a long thing to devise.
And truly, in my own poor judgement
I think it is a thing that is irrelevant,
Except to frame a setting for his matter.
But here's his tale, as you now shall hear.

THE CLERK'S TALE

HERE BEGINS THE TALE OF THE CLERK OF OXFORD

here is, on the west side of Italy,
Down at the root of Viso the cold,
A rich plain, known for its fertility,
Where many a tower and town you may behold
Founded in ancestral times of old,
And many another fine, noble sight;
Saluzzo its name, a landscape of delight.

A Marquis there was, once, lord of this land,
As were his worthy ancestors before,
And obedient, always ready to his hand,
Were all his subjects, both less and more.
Thus in delight he lived, in days of yore,
Beloved and feared, by favour of Fortune,
Both by his lords, and all of his commune.

And to that, you may add his lineage,
Being noblest born of Lombardy;
A fair person, strong and young in age,
And full of honour and of courtesy,
Discreet enough to rule all the country –
Save, in a few things he was to blame.
And Walter was this young lord's name.

I blame him thus, that he never thought
Of what events the future might provide,
But present pleasure was the thing he sought,
Such as to hawk and hunt on every side.
Nigh every other care he would let slide.
And he would – and this was worst of all –
Wed no wife, whatever might befall.

This thing alone his people felt so sore
That in a flock one day to him they went;
And one of them who wisest was in lore –
Or else the man most fit to win assent
From his lord, and tell him what they meant,
Or one who could well justify their fears –
He to the Marquis spoke as you shall hear:

'O noble Marquis, your humanity
Gives us assurance, adds to our boldness,
Whenever the demands of necessity
Force us to tell you of our sadness.
Accept then, lord, of your graciousness,
What we with sorrowful hearts explain,
And let your ears not my voice disdain.

Though I have naught to do in this matter
More than another man in this place,
Yet, inasmuch as you, my master dear,
Have always shown me favour and grace,
I dare the better ask of you a space
Of audience, to tell of our request;
Then you, my lord, shall do as you think best.

For surely lord, so well do we like you
And all your works, and ever have, that we
Could not indeed ourselves imagine how
We might live in greater felicity,
Save one thing, lord, if such your will might be:
That you should be a wedded man were best –
Then were your folk in sovereign heart's rest!

Bow your neck beneath that blissful yoke
Of sovereignty and not in slavery's guise,
Which men do call espousal, or wedlock.
And think, my lord, among your thoughts wise,
How all our days slip past, in sundry wise;
For though we sleep, or wake, or roam, or ride,
Time flees away; it nowhere will abide.

And though your green youth flowers bright,
In creeps age always, quiet as a stone.
And death may menace every age, and smite
In every state, for there escape it none.
And also certainly we know, each one,
That we shall die, as uncertain are we all
Of the one day on which our death shall fall.

Accept you now, in us, our true intent,
Who never yet refused your behest.
And, lord, we will, if that you should assent,
Choose you a wife, speedily, for the best,
Of the gentlest born, and of the highest
Of all this land, so that we might bring
Honour to God and you, in all this thing.

Deliver us out of all our care and dread,
And take a wife, for the high God's sake!
For if it so befell, as God forbid,
That through your death your line should forsake
Our land, and a strange successor take
Your heritage, O, woe to us alive!
Wherefore we beg you hastily to wive.'

Their humble prayer and their pious fear
Filled the Marquis' heart with clemency.
'Your wish,' quoth he, 'my own people dear,
Is one I never thought would constrain me.
I have rejoiced in all that liberty,
That seldom is experienced in marriage.
Where I was free, there I must find bondage.

Yet nonetheless, I see your true intent,
And trust to your wisdom, any day.
Wherefore, of my free will, I do assent
To being wed, as soon as ever I may.
But inasmuch as you offered today
To choose a wife for me, I release
You of that task, and let that offer cease.

For God knows, children we often find
Are unlike their noble ancestors before.
Bounty comes all from God, not the line
Which engendered them, and them bore.
I trust in God's bounty, and therefore
My marriage, my estate, and all the rest
I entrust to him; may he do as is best.

Leave me then to choose alone a wife;
That charge on me I will myself endure.
But I pray you, and charge you on your life,
Whatever wife I choose, you will be sure
To worship her while she lives, in your
Words and works, both here and everywhere,
As if she an Emperor's daughter were.

And furthermore, this shall you swear to me
Against my choice you will not moan or strive.
For since I shall forgo my liberty
At your request, as ever I may thrive,
Where my heart is set, there shall I wive.
And unless you assent in this manner,
I pray you, speak no more of the matter.'

With heartfelt willingness they swore assent
To all this thing – and no man said him nay –
Beseeching his grace, before they went,
That he would appoint them a certain day
For his espousal, as soon as ever he may.
For yet the people were somewhat in dread
Lest still the Marquis no wife would wed.

He chose a day, such as seemed him best,
On which he would be wed, of certainty,
And said he did all this at their request.
And they, both humbly and obediently,
Kneeling on their knees full reverently,
Thanked him; and thus they made an end
To their embassy, and home again did wend.

And thereupon he of his officers
Commanded that a feast they purvey,
And to his privy knights and squires
Such tasks gave them as in their duties lay.
And they did his commandments obey,
And each of them used all his diligence
To arrange the feast with reverence.

PART TWO

ot for from this palace, all honourable,
Where the Marquis prepared his marriage,
There stood a hamlet, its site delectable,
Where the poor folk dwelling in that village
Tended their homes and their pasturage,
And by their work and toil found sustenance
According as the earth gave them abundance.

Among these poor folk there dwelt a man
Who was considered poorest of them all;
But the high God sends sometimes, as he can,
His grace into a little ox's stall.
Janicula the village did him call.
A daughter had he, fair to the sight,
And Griselda she was named aright.

And if one spoke of virtuous beauty,
Then was she the fairest under the sun.
For she was brought up in true poverty;
No sinful thought through her head had run.
More often of the well than of the tun
She drank, and in virtue sought to please,
Knowing much labour, and no idle ease.

But though the maiden tender was of age,
Yet in the depths of her virginity
There was a spirit both mature and grave.
And she in great reverence and charity
Her poor old father nurtured carefully.
A few sheep, while she spun, she kept;
She was never idle unless she slept.

And when she homeward came, she would bring
Roots and herbs, and other such things, oft,
Which she sliced and seethed for their eating,
And made her bed full hard, and nothing soft.
And thus she kept her father's heart aloft,
With every obedience, and that diligence
With which a child shows a father reverence.

Upon Griselda, this humble creature,
Full often had the Marquis set his eye
As he rode out to hunt, peradventure;
And when it chanced that her he did espy,
It was not wantonly but with a sigh
He cast his eyes on her, in that place
And would often ponder on her face,

Commend her virtue and womanliness,
In his heart, surpassing any he might
Have seen, of her young age, in all respects.
For though the people have no great insight
Into virtue, he had considered right
Deeply of her bounty, and thought he would
Wed her only, if ever wed he should.

The wedding day arrived, and yet none can
Say what woman among them it shall be.
At which marvel wondered many a man,
And said, if they were speaking privately:
'Will our lord yet cling to his vanity?
Will he not wed? Alas, alas the while!
Why does he thus himself and us beguile?

But nonetheless, the Marquis has them make
Of gems, all set in gold and in azure,
Brooches and rings for Griselda's sake.
And of her clothes he takes the measure
From a maid full like to her in stature,
And other ornaments are fashioned, all
That to such a bride should rightly fall.

And the mid-morning of the very day
Approached, when the wedding would be.
And the whole palace was in full array,
Both hall and chamber, each in their degree.
Kitchens and pantries stuffed all with plenty
Delicious viands, and everything to see
Came from the furthest parts of Italy.

This royal Marquis, richly arrayed,
With lords and ladies in his company,
Whom to attend the feast had been bade,
And with all his retinue of chivalry,
And many a sound of sundry melody,
Unto the village of which I have told
In this array the nearest way they rode.

Griselda, God knows, all innocent,
That for herself was meant all this array,
To fetch water from the well she went,
Set to return as soon as ever she may;
For she had heard said, that on this day
The Marquis would wed, and if she might
She would happily see some of that sight.

She thought: 'I'll with the other maidens stand,
Who are my comrades, at our door and see
The Marchioness, and therefore what's on hand
I'll finish at home as quickly as may be,
The labour, that is, which belongs to me,
And then I could at leisure her behold,
If she this way unto the castle rode.'

But as over the threshold she'd have gone,
The Marquis came and began for her to call,
And she set down her water-pot anon
Beside the threshold, in an ox's stall,
And down upon her knees began to fall,
And with grave countenance knelt there, still,
Till she had heard what was the lord's will.

The pensive Marquis talked to the maid
Full soberly, and spoke in this manner:
'Where is your father, Griselda?' he said.
And she with reverence, her features clear,
Answered: 'Lord, he is already here.'
And in she goes without lingering,
And to the Marquis does her father bring.

He by the hand then took this aged man,
And said thus, when he had him on one side:
'Janicula, I neither may nor can
My heart's desire any longer hide.
If you accept whatever will betide,
Your daughter will I take, before I wend,
For my own wife, unto my life's end.

You love me, I know it well, for certain,
And you are my faithful liegeman born,
And all I wish myself, I dare to say,
You also wish, and especially therefore,
Say of the issue I mentioned before –
Whether you will unto that purpose draw,
To take me as your own son-in-law.'

The sudden news astonished him so
The man grew red, perplexed, all quaking
He stood; could hardly speak, although
These words emerged: 'Lord, I am willing
It be as you wish, and against your liking
I will nothing; you are my lord so dear.
Just as you wish decide the matter here.'

'Yet I desire,' quoth the Marquis with a sigh,
'That in your chamber I, and you and she
Have conversation; and would you know why?
So that I may ask her if she will be
My wife, and be guided then by me.
And all this should be done in your presence;
I must speak with you as our audience.'

And in the chamber while they were about
The marriage-treaty, of which you shall hear,
The people pressed around the house without,
And wondered at the decency and care
With which attentively she kept her father dear.
But well might Griselda wonder at the sight,
For never her eyes on such before did light.

And no wonder that she was astonished,
To see so many guests about the place.
She was not use to being so distinguished,
Which caused her to gaze with pallid face.
But briefly then this matter to embrace,
Here are the words that the Marquis said
To this benign, true and faithful maid.

'Griselda,' he said, 'you must understand
It is pleasing to your father and to me
That I wed you; and it may thus stand,
If, as I guess, you wish it so to be.
But these demands I make first,' quoth he,
'To which, since all is done in hasty guise,
Shall you agree, or it be otherwise.

I say you must be ready with good heart
To do my pleasure, and that I freely may,
Do as I think best, whether you laugh or smart,
And never must you grudge it, night or day,
And also when I say "yes", never say "nay",
Neither in words nor frowning countenance.
Swear this, and here I swear to our alliance.'

Griselda's Marriage

Wondering at his words, quaking for dread,
She said: 'Lord, ignoble and unworthy
Am I of the honour that you me should bed.
But as you wish yourself, so then will I.
And here I swear that always till I die
Will I willingly in work or thought obey,
On pain of death, though I fear it always.'

'That is enough, Griselda mine,' quoth he;
And forth he went with a face full sober
Out at the door, and after him came she,
And to the people he spoke in this manner:
'That is my wife,' quoth he, 'standing there.
Honour her and love her too, I pray,
Whoever loves me; there is no more to say.'

And that nothing of her former gear
She should bring into his house, he bade
The women to undress the girl right there;
At which the ladies showed less than glad
To handle the clothes in which she was clad.
But nonetheless, this maiden bright of hue
Foot to head they clothed again all new.

Her hair then they combed, that lay un-tressed
Untidy, and with slender-fingers all
A crown on her head they gently pressed,
And decked her with jewels great and small.
On her array why should my story fall?
The throng scarce knew her in her loveliness
When she transformed was by such richness.

The Marquis has espoused her with a ring
Brought for that very reason, and then her set
Upon a snow-white horse and gently ambling,
To his palace, without delay or fret,
With joyful people who her led and met,
Conveyed her; and thus the day they spend
In revel, till they see the sun descend.

And briefly for this tale to embrace,
I say, that to this new marchioness
God had such favour sent her of his grace
That it seemed of the unlikeliest
That she had been born and fed in lowliness,
Such as in a cottage or an ox's-stall,
But rather nourished in an Emperor's hall.

To everyone she became so dear
And revered, that folk where she was born,
Who from her birth had known her year by year,
Scarcely believed, though once they'd sworn,
That to Janicle, of whom I spoke before,
She was daughter, for by all conjecture
They thought she was quite another creature.

For though ever virtuous was she,
She had so increased in excellence
Of good qualities, and high nobility,
Was so discrete and fair in eloquence,
So benign, and worthy of reverence,
And could the people's heart so embrace,
That all loved her who looked upon her face.

Not only in Saluzzo, in the town,
Was published the virtue of her name,
But also beside in many a region.
If one spoke well, another did the same.
So spread of her high virtue the fame
That men and women, young as well as old,
Went to Saluzzo her face to behold.

Thus Walter wedded humbly – yet royally –
And wedded with fortunate nobility,
In God's peace lived full happily
At home, and outward grace enough had he.
And because he saw that in low degree
Virtue was often hid, people held him
For a prudent man, as is held seldom.

Griselda not only through her wit
Knew all the arts of wifely homeliness,
But also, when the case might require it,
The common cause too could she address.
There was no discord, rancour, sadness
In all that land that she could not ease,
And wisely bring them all to rest and peace.

And if her husband were absent, anon,
When noblemen or others of that country
Were wrath, she would make them atone.
Such wise and ripe phrases had she,
And judgement so filled with equity,
Men thought such as she the Heavens send
To save the people, and every wrong amend.

It was not long after this Griselda
Was wedded, that she a daughter bore.
Though she would have had a boy-child rather,
Glad was the Marquis still as all folk saw.
For though a maid child had come before,
She might still a boy-child yet achieve
Not being barren, so they all believed.

PART THREE

here befell, as it befalls often, though,
When the child had sucked a month or so
The Marquis in his heart longed, I owe,
To tempt his wife, her constancy to know,
And he could not out of his thoughts throw
This marvellous desire, his wife to test;
Needlessly, God knows, as I contest!

He had tried her well enough before,
And found her always good; what needed it
To tempt her, and always more and more,
Though some might praise his subtle wit?
As for me, I say evil we admit
In testing a wife when there is no need,
And placing her in pain and dread indeed.

The Marquis wrought it in this manner:
He came alone at night to where she lay,
With a stern face, he troubled did appear,
And then: 'Griselda,' quoth he, 'that day
When I took you from your poor array,
And set you in a state of nobleness –
Have you forgotten it, as I would guess?

I say Griselda, this present dignity,
To which I have raised you, I vow,
Cannot have made you forgetful be
That I took you from your estate full low,
With all the little wealth you might know.
Take heed of every word I say to you;
There is no one to hear us but us two.

You well know yourself how you came here
Into this house; it was not long ago.
And though to me you are prized and dear,
Among my noblemen you are not so.
They say it is great shame to them and woe
To be subject, and to live in bondage,
To you who are born of a small village.

And especially since you your daughter bore
These words have been spoken, more not less.
Yet I desire, as I have done before,
To live my life with them in peace and rest.
I may not in this case be deemed reckless;
I must do with your daughter, still
Not as I would, but as my people will.

And yet, God knows, it's painful to me.
But nonetheless, without your knowing
I will do nothing, but this I wish,' quoth he,
'That you assent with me to all this thing.
Show your patience now in your being
That you swore to me in your village,
The day that we agreed our marriage.

When she had heard all this, she received
It all unchanged in word or countenance,
For, as it seemed, she was not aggrieved.
She said: 'Lord, all power is in your glance.
My child and I, with true obedience,
Are all yours, and you may save or kill
Your own things: work then as you will.

There can be nothing, God my soul save,
That you desire that may displease me;
No I require nothing for to have
Nor dread to lose, save only thee.
Your will in my heart shall ever be;
No length of time nor death may this deface,
Nor direct my thoughts to another place.'

Glad was the Marquis at her answering,
But yet he feigned as if he were not so.
All dreary was his face and his looking
When that he would out of the chamber go.
Soon after this, a few moments or so,
He secretly had told all his intent
Unto a man, and to his wife him sent.

A sort of servant was this confidant,
As faithful a man as ever he had
In things great, and such folk also can
Do execution in things that are bad;
The lord knew he loved him from a lad.
And when this sergeant knew his lord's will,
Into the chamber he stole quiet and still.

'Madam,' he said, 'you must forgive me,
If I do a thing to which I am constrained.
You are so wise that you will clearly see
A lord's command must ever be attained.
It may well be lamented and complained
But all men must his desire obey.
And so will I; there is no more to say.

Griselda's Sorrow

This child I am commanded for to take.'
– And spoke no more, but grasped the child then
Violently, and a vile face he did make
As though he would have slain it as he went.
Griselda must endure all and consent,
And as a lamb she sat meek and still,
And let this cruel sergeant do his will.

Suspicious the reputation of this man,
Suspect his face, suspect his word also,
Suspect the time at which he thus began.
Alas, her daughter that she loved so,
She thought he would slay her though!
But nonetheless, she neither wept nor sighed,
Conforming to whatever might betide.

But at the last to speak she began,
And humbly to the sergeant replied,
That as he was a worthy nobleman,
To let her kiss her child before he slay it.
And in her lap the little child she laid it
With full sad face, and began to bless
And lull it, and after began to kiss.

And thus she said, in her gentle voice:
'Farewell, my child! I never you shall see.
But since I have marked you with the cross
Of your Father – blessed must He be –
That for us died upon the cross-tree,
Your soul, little child, may He now take,
For this night shall you die for my sake.'

I think that for a nurse, if one there was,
It would have been hard this sight to see;
Well might a mother then have cried 'alas!'
But nonetheless, so firm steadfast was she
That she endured all adversity;
And to the sergeant humbly she said,
'Have here again your sweet little maid.

Go now,' quoth she, 'and do my lord's behest.
But one thing I pray you of your grace,
Unless my lord forbade it you, at least
Bury this little body in some place
Where neither birds nor beasts may it deface.'
But he no word to that request would say,
But took the child and went on his way.

The sergeant came unto his lord again,
And told him how Griselda did appear
In this, her words, the details short and plain,
Delivering to him her daughter dear.
The lord showed some pity in his manner,
But nonetheless his purpose held he still,
As lords do when they must have their will.

And bade the sergeant that he secretly
Should the child gently take and wrap,
In every circumstance all tenderly,
And carry it in a cradle or his lap –
But upon pain of death, by no mishap
Allow any man to know of his intent,
Nor whence he came, nor whither he went –

But to Bologna, to his sister dear,
That at this time of Panico was countess,
He should it take and tell her of the matter,
Beseeching her to make it her business
To foster this child with all gentleness.
And whose child it was he bade her hide
From everyone, whatever might betide.

The sergeant went, and fulfilled this thing;
But to the Marquis at this time turn we.
For now he goes about wondering
If from his wife's face he might see,
Or by her words perceive, whether she
Had changed at all; but never could he find
Her anything but steadfast ever and kind.

As glad, as humble, as eagerly she plies
Service, loving, as she was wont to be,
To him in every manner, and every guise.
Nor of her daughter a word spoke she.
No outward sign of her adversity
Was seen in her, nor ever her daughter's name
Did she speak, in earnest or in game.

PART FOUR

n this state they reached the fourth year
Before she was with child, God us hold,
A boy child she bore to this Walter,
Full gracious and full fair to behold.
And when the father by his folk is told,
Not only he, but his folk in all the ways
Cheer this child, and God they thank and praise.

When it was two years old, and from the breast
Weaned by its nurse, on a certain day
The Marquis with another whim was blessed
To test his wife once more now, if he may.
O needlessly was she tested in this way!
But married men never keep wise measure
Whenever they find a patient creature.

'Wife,' quoth the Marquis, 'you have heard ere this
My people still resent our marriage day;
And especially since my son new-born is,
It is worse than ever in every way.
The mutterings my heart and spirit slay,
For to my ears comes the deadly smart
Of that voice, and nigh destroys my heart.

Now they speak thus: "When Walter is gone,
Then shall the blood of Janicle succeed
And be our lord, for other have we none."
Such my people speak, in fear indeed.
I must of such murmurs take full heed,
For certainly I dread such muttering,
Though they will not say it in my hearing.

I would live in peace if I but might.
And therefore am decided utterly,
That as I served his sister by night,
Right so think I to serve him, secretly.
This I warn you of, so that suddenly
You with woe might not be outraged;
Be patient, and towards that I you pray.'

'I have,' quoth she, 'said thus, and ever shall:
I wish for nothing, nothing, I say again,
But as you wish; naught grieves me at all
Though my daughter and my son be slain –
At your commandment, that is to say.
I have had no part of my children twain
Save first sickness, and then woe and pain.

You are our lord; do with your own things
Just as you wish; ask no advice of me.
For as I left at home all my clothing
When first I came to you, then so,' quoth she,
'I left my will and all my liberty,
And donned clothes of yours, wherefore I pray,
Do your pleasure; I will your wish obey.

And certainly if I'd had prescience
To know your will ere you your will told
I would have done it without negligence.
But now I know your wish and it behold,
To your pleasure all firmly I will hold.
For if I knew my death would bring you ease,
Right gladly would I die, you to please.

For death is nothing in comparison
To your love.' And when the Marquis knew
His wife's constancy, then he cast down
His eyes two, and then he wondered too
That she in patience suffered all this rue.
And off he went with dreary countenance,
But in his heart his spirit was enhanced.

The ugly sergeant, in the same wise
That he her daughter snatched, so did he –
Or worse, if men a worse can devise –
Take her son that full was of beauty.
And, ever at one, so patient was she,
That she showed no look of sadness,
But kissed her son, and after did him bless.

Save this: she begged him that he might
For her little son fashion him a grave,
His tender limbs, delicate to sight,
From wild beasts and birds for to save.
But he no answer to her prayer gave;
He went his way as if he heard her not.
But to Bologna tenderly it brought.

The Marquis wondered, ever the more,
At her great patience then, and if he
Had not known truly that all before
Her children so perfectly loved she,
He would have thought that in some subtlety
Either of malice or of cruel spirit
She had endured all this with sad visage.

Yet he knew that next to himself again,
She loved her children best in every wise.
But now women would I ask right plain
If all these trials might not now suffice?
What could a harsh husband more devise
To prove her wifehood and her steadfastness,
While he continued ever in his harshness?

But there are folk of such inclination,
That when a certain end they undertake,
They cannot fall short of their intention,
But as though they were bound to the stake,
They never will their first pledge break.
Just so this Marquis here fully proposed
To test his wife, as he was first disposed.

He waits to see, will word or countenance
Betray that she has changed towards him, waits
But never can detect a variance;
She was at one in heart as in visage.
And the truer was, the more she aged,
If ever such a thing were possible,
To him in love, and the more dutiful.

So that it seemed, between the two
There was but one will, for as Walter wished
The same desire was her pleasure too.
And, God be thanked, all was for the best.
She well showed, despite the world's unrest,
A wife, for herself then, nothing should
Will in effect, but as her husband would.

Ill report of Walter was widely spread,
That with a cruel heart he, wickedly,
Because a poor woman he chose to wed,
Had murdered both his children secretly.
Such was the word among them generally.
No wonder is it, for to the people's ear
There came no word, but that they murdered were.

At which, whereas the people there before
Had loved him well, the ill-report for shame
Made them hate him bitterly, and more.
The name of murderer is a hateful name;
But nonetheless, in earnest not in game,
He on his cruel purpose still was bent;
To test his wife was still his set intent.

When his daughter was twelve years of age,
He to the court of Rome, in subtle wise
Informed of his intent, sent his message
Commanding them such bulls to devise
As for his cruel purpose might suffice:
Stating the Pope, to set men's minds at rest,
Bade him to wed again, as he thought best.

I say he bade them to counterfeit
The Pope's bulls, there making mention
That he had leave his first wife to reject,
According to the Papal dispensation
To calm all the rancour and dissension
Between him and his people; thus the bull,
Which they then made public, and in full.

The common people, as is no wonder,
Thought indeed these things were truly so.
But when the tidings came to Griselda,
I deem that her heart was full of woe,
But she, as steadfastly as ever though,
Was disposed, this humble creature,
The adversity of Fortune to endure.

Abiding ever his will and pleasure
He to whom she was given, heart and all,
As if to her content, in worldly measure.
But briefly, since this story tell I shall,
The Marquis now wrote an especial
Letter, in which he revealed his intent,
Then secretly to Bologna had it sent.

The Earl of Panico, the noble who
Had wedded his sister, especially
He begged to bring back his children two,
In honourable state all openly.
But one thing he asked specifically,
That, though men enquire, he give no answer
To those who asked whose children they were,

Saying the maiden now would wedded be
To the Marquis of Saluzzo, right anon.
And as the Earl was asked, so did he,
For on the day set, he on his way is gone
Towards Saluzzo, and lords many a one
In rich array, this maiden for to guide,
Her young brother riding by her side.

Arrayed in clothes fit for her marriage
Was this fresh maid, decked in gems clear.
Her brother, who was seven years of age,
Also arrayed full freshly in his gear.
And so with great nobility they near
Saluzzo, towards which their journey lay,
From day to day, riding on their way.

PART FIVE

eanwhile, following his wicked deed,
The Marquis, to try his wife yet more
To the furthest limits of loyalty,
And so gain knowledge, as before
As to the steadfastness he saw,
One day, and in open audience,
Bluntly pronounced this dread sentence:

'Certainly, Griselda, it was pleasant
To take you as my wife for your goodness,
In that you were loyal and obedient –
And not for your lineage or riches.
But now the truth is here in its fullness,
For in great lordship, I realise,
There is great servitude, contrariwise.

I cannot do as any ploughman may;
My people are demanding that I take
Another wife: they moan day after day.
And the Pope determined, too, to slake
Their rancour, will consent I'll undertake.
And in truth, this much to you I'll say:
My new wife is already on her way.

Be strong of heart and vacate your place.
And the dower that you brought to me,
Take back again; I grant it of my grace.
Return now to your father's house,' quoth he.
'None can forever know prosperity;
With calm heart I advise you to endure
The stroke of Fortune as you did before.'

And she replied again, in her patience:
'My lord, 'quoth she, 'I know as always,
That between your great magnificence
And my own poverty none can nor may
Make comparison, not in any way.
I never thought myself in any manner
Fit to be wife – nor yet to clean your chamber.

And in this house you me a lady made –
The high God take I for my witness,
And as surely as my soul he may save –
I never thought myself lady or mistress,
But humble servant to your worthiness,
And ever shall, while life may endure,
Far above all other worldly creatures.

That you so long of your generosity
Have held me in honour and always
Nobly, where I did not deserve to be,
That I thank God for, and you, I pray
He repay it you; there is no more to say.
Unto my father gladly will I wend,
And with him dwell unto my life's end.

There was I fostered as a child so small,
My life there will I lead till I be dead,
A widow clean in body, heart and all.
For since I gave to you my maidenhead,
And am your true wife, it is no dread:
God forbid such a lord's wife to take
Another man to husband, for his sake!

And with your new wife God in his grace
Grant you happiness and prosperity;
For I will gladly yield to her my place,
In which I used so blissfully to be.
For since it is your wish, my lord,' quoth she,
'That once were to me all my heart's rest,
That I should go, I'll go as you think best.

And since you offer me such dower
As I first brought, it is then in my mind
That they were wretched clothes, not fair,
The which were hard now for me to find.
O good God, how gentle and how kind
You seemed, by your speech and visage,
The day that you took me in marriage!

But so it's said – and now I find it true,
For in effect it is proved such by me –
Love is not, old, what once it was when new.
But, my lord, whatever the adversity,
Though death be in the case, it may not be
That ever in word or deed could I repent
Of giving you my heart with full intent.

My lord, you know that in my father's place
You did me strip of all the clothes I had,
And richly clad me then, of your grace.
To you I brought naught else, be it said,
But faith, and nakedness, and maidenhead.
And here again your clothing I restore,
And your wedding ring for evermore.

The rest of your jewels, lie readily
To hand in your chamber, I dare say.
Naked out of my father's house,' quoth she,
'I came, and naked shall I go away.
All your wishes I'll follow as always.
But yet I hope it would not be your intent
That I smock-less out of your palace went.

You could not do so shameful a thing
As let this womb in which your children lay
Be seen before the people in my walking
All bare; wherefore I to you do pray,
Let me not like a worm go by the way.
Remember now, my own lord so dear,
I was your wife, though all unworthy here.

In recompense then for my maidenhead,
Which I brought you, and no longer bear,
Vouchsafe a gift and grant me instead
Such a smock as I was wont to wear,
That I may clothe with it the womb of her
That was your wife; and here I take my leave
Of you, my own lord, lest I you grieve.'

'The smock,' quoth he, 'that you have on your back,
Let it remain, and take it home with thee.'
But yet with difficulty he spoke, in fact,
And went away, in sadness, and with pity.
Before the folk then herself stripped she.
And in her smock, with head and foot all bare,
Towards her father's house began to fare.

The folk followed weeping, as she went by,
And they cursed Fortune everyone.
But she from weeping kept her eyes dry,
And all this time word spoke she none.
Her father, who the tidings heard anon,
Cursed the day and time that ever Nature
Created him to be a living creature.

For beyond doubt this poor old man
Had ever been suspicious of the marriage.
Because he deemed, since it all began,
That once the lord's desires were assuaged,
He would consider that it disparaged
His status, on so lowly a girl to light,
And would reject her swiftly as he might.

To meet his daughter, hastily goes he,
For by folk's noise he knew she was coming.
And with her old cloak, as it might be,
He covered her, full sorrowfully weeping.
But over her body he might not it fling,
For coarse was the cloth, and she in age
Owned many a day more than at her marriage.

So with her father, for a certain space,
Dwelt this flower of wifely patience,
Who neither by her words nor in her face
Before the folk, nor ever in their absence,
Showed that anyone had done offence
To her, nor showed she her remembrance
Of former high state, in her countenance.

And no wonder, for in her high estate
Her spirit had shown but plain humility;
No luxurious tastes, no feelings delicate,
No pomp, no semblance there of royalty,
But she was full of patient benignity,
Discreet and void of pride, and honourable,
And to her husband ever meek and dutiful.

Men speak of Job, and of his humbleness,
Of which clerics, when they wish to, prattle
Regarding men especially, yet I stress,
Though clerks praise women but a little,
No man's humility gains him acquittal,
As woman's can, nor are men half so true
As women are, unless the world be new.

From Bologna the Earl of Panico's come,
The news of which is spread to great and less;
And to the people's ear, all and some,
It is made known a new marchioness
He's brought with him, in pomp, such richness
That never a man's eye might ever see
A nobler array in Western Lombardy.

The Marquis, who devised and knew it, he,
Ere that the Earl was come, sent a message
To his poor innocent Griselda, she
With humble heart and happy visage,
And not a proud thought in her spirit,
Came at his behest, kneeling at his feet,
And reverently and wisely did him greet.

'Griselda,' quoth he, 'my wish entirely
Is that this maid, who shall be wed to me,
Be received tomorrow as royally
As it is possible in my house to be;
And also that everyone in their degree
Be ranked fitly, seating and service-wise,
With noble pleasure, as best as I can devise.

I have no women capable, for certain,
Of attending to every circumstance
As I would wish, and therefore would fain
That of it yours was all the governance.
You know of old my will in every instance.
Though your array is but poor today,
Do your duty, and in the humblest way.'

'I am not merely glad, lord,' quoth she,
'To do your will, but I desire also
To serve you and please you in my degree,
Without wearying, and will do so.
No never, whether in joy or woe,
Shall the spirit within my heart stint
To love you best, with all my true intent.'

With that she began to set the house aright,
And to lay the tables and beds to make,
And wearied herself to do all that she might,
Begging the chambermaids, for God's sake,
To hasten, and quickly sweep and shake.
And she, willing to serve the most of all,
Arrayed every chamber and then the hall.

About mid-morning did the Earl alight,
And brought the noble children that day,
While the people ran to see the sight
Of their splendour and their rich array.
And then among them first began to say
That Walter was no fool, though he wished
To change his wife, for it was for the best.

For she is fairer, and so deemed them all
Than Griselda, and tender is of age,
And fairer fruit between them shall fall,
And nobler, due to her high lineage.
Her brother too was of so fair a visage
The people were pleased in an instant,
Commending now the Marquis' governance.

O storm-blown people, fickle and untrue,
Undiscerning, turning like a vane,
Delighting ever in all rumour new,
For like the moon itself, you wax and wane!
Full of chatter, worthy of all disdain!
Your judgement false, fitful in your ends;
A fool is he, who ever on you depends.

– Thus said the grave folk in that city,
When the people gazed up and down,
For they were glad of the novelty,
To have a new lady in their town.
No more of this will I make mention,
But to Griselda again I make address,
And tell of her labours and her steadfastness.

Griselda was busied with everything
That to the feast itself was pertinent.
Unembarrassed was she by her clothing,
Though it was coarse, and sorely rent,
But with glad face to the gate she went
With other folk, to greet the marchioness,
And after that she went about her business.

With a glad face his guests she received
And so skilfully, and all in their degree,
That no fault was by anyone perceived.
But ever they wondered who she might be
That in such poor array, as they could see,
Was capable of such honour and reverence
And were noble in praise of her prudence.

Meanwhile amongst all this she did not stint
The maid and her brother to commend
With all her heart, in her benign intent,
So much so no one could her praise amend.
But at the last, when that the lords went
To sit down to their meat, he began to call
Griselda, as she was busied in the hall.

'Griselda,' quoth he, as it were in play,
'How like you my wife and her beauty?'
'Right well,' quoth she, 'my lord, by my faith,
A fairer saw I never none than she.
I pray God to bring her prosperity;
And so hope I that he will to you send
Pleasure enough, until your lives end.

One thing I beseech, in warning, though,
That you do not goad with your tormenting
This tender maid, as you have others so;
For she is fostered in her nourishing
More tenderly, and by my supposing,
She could never adversity endure
As could a basely fostered creature.'

And when Walter saw all her patience,
Her glad face, no malice there at all,
Though he had oft done to her offence,
And she as steadfast, constant as a wall,
Maintaining ever her innocence overall,
The Marquis in his heart could not repress
His pity for such wifely steadfastness.

'It is enough, Griselda mine,' quoth he;
'Be now no more aghast nor dismayed.
I have your faith and your benignity,
As well as ever woman's was, assayed,
In high estate, and in poverty arrayed.
I know, dear wife, your steadfastness by this!'
And took her in his arms then, with a kiss.

And she for wonder could not seem to keep
Her mind upon the things that he now said.
She was as one who starts up out of sleep,
Till all her bewilderment she might shed.
'Griselda, by God who died in our stead,
You are my wife, no other do I have,
God save my soul,' quoth he, 'nor ever had!

This your daughter, whom you have supposed
Would be my wife; the other, faithfully,
Shall be my heir, as I have pre-disposed;
And you have born him in your body, truly.
At Bologna have I kept them, secretly;
Take them again, for now you may believe
For neither of your children need you grieve!

And folk who otherwise have talked of me,
I tell them, that I did not do this deed
Out of malice, nor out of cruelty,
But to test your steadfastness, indeed,
And not to slay my children – God forbid! –
Only to keep them secretly and still,
Till I your purpose knew and all your will.'

When she heard this, swooning she did fall
For piteous joy, then after her swooning,
Both her young children to her did call,
And in her arms, all piteously weeping,
Embraced them, and tenderly kissing,
Now like a mother, with salt tears there
She bathed both her visage and her hair.

O, what a piteous thing it was to see
Her swooning and her humble voice to hear!
'*Graunt mercy*, lord, God thank you,' quoth she
'That you have saved my children dear!
Now I care not if I should die, and here;
Since I have still your love and your grace,
No matter is it when death my spirit takes.

O my young children, tender, and dear
Your sorrowful mother did think truly
That cruel hounds, or foul beast, for fear,
Had devoured you; but God, in his mercy,
And your benign father, so tenderly
Have kept you safe, and here you are found!
And suddenly she swooned to the ground.

And in her swoon so tightly held she
To her two children, whom she did embrace,
That only with skill and great difficulty
The children from her arms could they unlace.
Oh, many a tear on many a pitying face
Ran down the cheeks of those at her side;
Scarcely in her presence could they abide.

Walter comforts her, her sorrow slakes;
She rises up, confused, from her trance,
And everyone much of her feelings makes,
Till she is once again in countenance.
Walter dances on her such fine attendance
It is a true delight to see joy hover,
Between the two, now they are together.

The ladies, when the right moment came,
Took her away, to her chamber were gone,
And stripped her there of her coarse array,
And in a cloth of gold that brightly shone,
And with a richly-jewelled royal crown
Upon her head, into the hall her brought,
And there she was honoured as she ought.

Thus had this piteous day a blissful end,
For each man and woman, with all their might,
Sought the day in mirth and revel to spend,
Till in the welkin shone the starry light.
For far more noble then in each man's sight
Was this feast, and richer in its display,
Than was the feasting on their marriage day.

Full many a year in high prosperity
These two lived, in concord and in rest,
And richly his daughter married he
Unto a lord, one of the worthiest
In all Italy; and then in peace and rest
His wife's father in his court he kept,
Till the soul out of his body crept.

His son succeeded, and his heritage
Enjoyed in peace, after his father's day,
And fortunate also was in his marriage –
Though he put his wife to no such assay.
Our world's not so tough in fibre, nay,
As it seems to have been in days of yore.
And hearken what the author says therefore:

This story is told, not because wives could
Follow Griselda in her humility,
It would be unreasonable if they should;
But that everyone, in their degree,
Should yet be constant in adversity
As was Griselda – that is what Petrarch cites
Of the story, which in high style he writes.

For since a woman showed such patience
To mortal man, then the more so we ought
To accept all willingly what God us sends.
For it is right He tries what he has wrought;
Yet tempts no man for whom His Son has bought
Redemption, as Saint James does truly say.
Though there's no doubt, He tries folk every day.

And suffers us, as if for our exercise,
With sharp scourges of adversity,
To be scourged, full oft, in sundry wise;
Not though to prove our will, for He
Ere we are born knows all our frailty.
And for our best is all His governance;
Let us then live in virtuous sufferance.

But one word, lordings, hearken, ere I go:
It would be hard to find nowadays
Griseldas, in any city here below;
For if that they were put to such assay,
The gold in them is so alloyed, always,
With brass, that though the coin cheat the eye,
It would rather break in two than bend, say I.

With which here, for love of the Wife of Bath –
Whose life and all her sect may God maintain
In high mastery, or it were a pity, alas –
I will with lusty heart, fresh and green,
Sing you a song, to gladden you, I mean;
And let us finish all this serious matter.
Hear then my song that runs in this manner.

L'ENVOY DE CHAUCER

riselda is dead, and all her patience,
And both are buried now in Italian dale.
For which I cry to my audience,
Wedded men be not eager to assail
Your patient wives, in hopes to find
Griselda, for with certainty you'll fail.

O noble wives, full of lofty prudence,
Allow not humility your tongue to nail!
And let no clerk have cause from diligence
To write of you a story that might entail
All that Griselda's did, patient and kind,
Lest fabled cow wind you in her entrails!

Follow Echo, who never keeps her silence,
But ever answers you with hail for hail.
Do not be cowed in your innocence,
But take on you the mastery without fail.
Imprint this lesson deeply in your mind,
For common profit, since it may avail.

You arch-wives, be strong in your defence,
Since you are mighty as the camel hale;
Suffer no man to do you an offence.
And slender wives, feeble in war and frail,
Be fierce as the tigress, that in Inde we find;
Clack away like the mill, beneath the sail!

And dread them not, do them no reverence;
For though your husband be armed in mail,
The arrows of your forceful eloquence
Will pierce his breast and turn him pale.
With jealousy I'd advise that you him bind,
And then you'll see him cower like a quail.

If you are fair, in other folk's presence
Show your face, and your apparel trail,
If you are foul, be free with your expense;
To get you friends, thus labour and travail.
Be light-hearted as a leaf, be blind,
And let *him* grieve, and weep, and wring, and wail!

Here ends the Tale of the Clerk of Oxford

The Merchant's Prologue

The Prologue to the Merchant's Tale

' eeping and wailing, care and other sorrow,
I've known enough of, even-tide and morrow,'
Quoth the Merchant, 'as do others though,
Who have been wed, I know that it is so,
Too well I see that's how it fares with me.
I have a wife, the worst sort there may be;
For even though the fiend were to wed her,
She would outmatch him, I'd truly swear.
What should I especially for you recall
Of her deep malice? She's a shrew in all!
There is a vast and a broad difference
Betwixt Griselda's wondrous patience,
And my wife's exceeding cruelty.
Were I free once more, I say to thee,
I would ever again avoid the snare.
We wedded men live in sorrow and care.
Try it who will, and he indeed shall find
That I say true, by Saint Thomas of Inde! –
Speaking for most of us; I don't say all.
God forbid that ever that should befall!
Ah, good sir Host, I have wedded been
These two months, no more than that, you see;
And yet I know, he that all his life
Wifeless has been, could in no like manner
Tell so much sorrow as I now, here,
Could tell of my wife's cussedness!'
'Now,' quoth our Host, 'Merchant, so God you bless,

Since you know so much of all that art,
Full heartily I pray you, tell us part.'
  'Gladly,' quoth he, 'but of my own sore
Because my heart is sad, I'll tell no more.'

The Merchant's Tale

Here begins the Merchant's Tale

nce there was, dwelling in Lombardy
A worthy knight, born in Pavia he,
In which he lived in great prosperity.
And sixty years a wifeless man, was free
To pursue all his bodily delight
With women, where lay his appetite,
As do these fools who are but secular.
And when he had passed his sixtieth year,
Whether from holiness, or in his dotage
I cannot say, but he was in such a rage,
This knight, to see himself a wedded man
That day and knight he ponders all he can
Seeking for how he might wedded be,
Praying Our Lord to grant him that he
Might once know all of the blissful life
That is between a husband and his wife,
And to live in that holy bond, tight bound,
In which God first man and woman wound.
'No other life,' said he, 'is worth a bean;
For wedlock is so comfortable, I mean,
That in this world it seems a paradise.'
– So said this old knight who was so wise.
And certainly, as true as God is King,
To take a wife it is a glorious thing,
Especially when a man is old and hoar;
Then is a wife the fruit of all his hoard.
Then should he take a wife young and fair,

On whom he might engender an heir,
And all his life in joy and solace pass,
While all the bachelors may sing 'alas!'
Where they are lost in the adversity
Of love which is but childish vanity.
And truly, it is fitting it should be so,
And bachelors have all the pain and woe.
On fragile base they build, fragility
They find when they would have security.
They live but as a bird or as a beast,
In liberty and free of any leash,
Yet a wedded man in his new state
Lives a life blissful and moderate,
Under this yoke of true marriage bound.
Well may his heart in joy and bliss abound;
For who shall be obedient as a wife?
Who is so true, and caring of his life
In sickness and in health, as is his mate?
For weal or woe she will not him forsake,
She never wearies, but will love and serve,
Though he lie bedridden while on this earth.
And yet some scholars say it is not so,
And Theophrastus he is one of those.
What matter if Theophrastus choose to lie?
'For thriftiness,' quoth he, 'take not a wife,
In order to spare your household from expense.
A faithful servant will show more diligence
In nurturing your estate than your own wife,
For she will claim a half of it all her life.
And if you are sick, so God me save,
Your true friends, or an honest knave,
Will help you more than she that waits, I say
To own your goods, and has for many a day.
And if you take a wife to have and hold,
You may easily end up as a cuckold.'
This opinion, and a hundred worse,
Writes the man, may God his ashes curse!

But ignore all such, it's vanity;
Defy Theophrastus, hearken unto me.
  A wife is God's gift, say I, verily.
All other kinds of gift, assuredly –
Such as lands, rents, pasture, rights in common,
Or movables – they are all gifts of Fortune,
Which vanish like the shadows on a wall.
But doubt not, plainly I shall speak to all,
A wife will last, and in your house endure,
Longer then you may wish, peradventure!
  Marriage is a mighty sacrament;
He that has no wife is good as spent;
He lives helplessly and desolate –
I speak of folk in the secular state.
And listen why – I do not speak for naught –
Because woman was for man's help wrought.
Great God, when he first Adam created,
And saw him all alone, and belly-naked,
God of his goodness said, as He had planned:
'Let us create a helpmate for this man,
One like himself' – and then created Eve.
Here may you see, and so may you believe,
A wife is a man's help and consolation,
His terrestrial paradise and salvation.
So obedient and virtuous is she,
They cannot help but live in unity.
One flesh are they, and one flesh, I guess,
Has but one heart, in joy and in distress.
  A wife – ah, Saint Mary, *benedicitee*!
How should a man then know adversity
Who has a wife? For sure, I cannot say.
The bliss between them both, night and day,
No tongue can tell about nor heart can think.
If he is poor, she labours, every wink;
She nurtures his goods, wastes not a shell.
All that her husband likes, she likes as well.
She never once says 'nay', when he says 'yes'.

'Do this,' says he, 'all ready, sire,' she says.
O blissful order of true wedlock precious,
You are so happy and so virtuous,
Commended and approved, week by week,
That every man that's worth more than a leek,
Upon his bare knees ought throughout his life
To thank the God who sent to him a wife,
Or else should pray to God that He might send
A wife to him, to endure till his life end,
For then he can live life in security
And not be troubled, as far as I can see,
As long as by his wife's advice he's led;
Then may he boldly hold aloft his head.
They are so true, and withal are so wise.
Thus, if you'd live as learned men advise,
Do always as the womenfolk shall cite.
  Lo then, how Jacob, as the clerics write,
By good counsel of his mother, Rebecca,
Binds the kid's skin round his neck, a
Ploy by which his father's blessing's won.
  Lo, how Judith, for thus the stories run,
By wise counsel, God's own people kept,
And slew King Holofernes while he slept.
  Lo, how by Abigail's good counsel she
Saved her own husband Nabal, when he
Looked to be slain; and Esther, she also
By good counsel delivered out of woe
The people of God, and had Mordecai
Enhanced by Ahasuerus in God's eye.
  There is no rank superior, in life,
Says Seneca, to that of humble wife.
  Endure your wife's tongue, as Cato has it;
She shall command, and you must endure it –
And yet she will obey out of courtesy.
A wife is the keeper of your property;
Well may the sick man wail and weep
When there is no wife the house to keep.

I warn you, if wisely you would work,
Love your wife well, as Christ loved his Church.
If you love yourself, then love your wife.
No man hates his flesh, but all his life
He nurtures it; and therefore bid I thee,
Cherish your wife, or never prosperous be.
Husband and wife, whatever men jesting say,
Among the worldly, keep to the safest way.
They are so knit, no harm may thus abide,
And especially upon the woman's side.
So January considered, of whom I told,
For he, when the time came that he was old,
Thought of the pleasant life, the virtuous quiet,
That is marriage's sweet and honeyed diet,
And for his friends thus one day he sent
To tell them the gist of all his fond intent.
  With grave face this tale to them he told:
'Friends,' he said, 'see, I am hoar and old,
And almost, God knows, on the grave's brink;
Now, of my soul somewhat I must think.
I have my strength wantonly expended –
Blessed be God that this may be amended!
For I will, indeed, become a married man,
And that anon, with all the haste I can.
I'll wed some maid, of fair and tender age,
I pray you, prepare you for my marriage
Swiftly now, for I cannot long abide.
And I will try to discover, on my side,
To whom I might be wedded rapidly.
But since there are more of you than me,
You are more likely such a one to spy
Than me, one with whom I might best ally.
  But of one thing I warn you, my friends dear,
I will have no old wife, no, never fear.
She shall not be more than twenty, say,
Old fish but young flesh I'd have any day;
Better a pike,' quoth he, 'than a pickerel,

Yet fresh veal better than old beef is well.
I'd wish for no woman thirty years of age;
Such is but bedstraw and coarse for forage.
And old widows, God knows that they float
As trickily as did Wade's fabled boat,
Making so much mischief when they wish,
That I'd never have a moment's peace.
For as diverse schools make subtle clerics;
Woman, of many schools, part-scholar is.
But surely, a young thing men may guide,
As warm wax in the hands, readily plied.
Wherefore, I say plainly, in a single clause,
I will have no old wife, and here's the cause.
For if it happened by some cruel mischance
I would find no pleasure in her glance,
And I'd end in adultery, by and by,
And go straight to the devil when I die.
No children on her should I then beget;
And I'd prefer my hounds to eat me yet
Rather than that my property should fall
Into strange hands, and this I tell you all.
  I am not in my dotage; I know why
Men should be wed, and furthermore I
Know that many a man speaks of marriage
That knows no more than does my page,
Of why every man should take a wife –
If he cannot live chaste throughout his life –
Take him a wife with proper devotion
And for the sake of lawful procreation
Of children, to the honour of God above,
And not for passion only or for love;
And so that he might lechery eschew,
And pay his debt when it falls due;
Or so that each should help the other
In misery, as a sister does her brother,
And live in chastity full holily.
But, sires, that is not I, by your leave;

For, God be thanked, I dare to boast,
I feel my limbs stronger are than most,
Enough to do all that a man may do.
I know best myself what I can do, too.
Though I am hoary, I am like a tree
That blossoms white before the fruit, we see,
A blossoming tree is neither dry nor dead.
And I am only hoary on my head.
My heart and all my limbs are as green
As laurel all the year is sweetly seen.
And since you have heard all my intent,
I pray that you will, to my wish, assent.'
  Various men variously him told
Of marriage, gave many examples old.
Some blamed it, and some praised it again;
But at the last, and briefly to explain,
As everyday occur fierce altercations
Between friends in their disputations,
A quarrel fell out between his friends so;
Of whom the one was called Placebo,
While Justinus, in truth, was the other.
  Placebo said: 'O January, my brother,
You have little need, my lord so dear,
To take counsel of anyone that's here,
Unless being so full of sapience,
You'd dislike, of your noble prudence,
To stray far from the words of Solomon.
This is what he said to us, every one,
"Work everything by counsel" – so said he –
'And then you'll not repent latterly."
But though Solomon spoke this word,
My own dear brother and my lord,
God in Heaven bring my soul to rest,
I hold your own counsel still the best.
For, brother mine, since opinion's rife,
Well, I have been a courtier all my life,
And God knows, though I unworthy be,

I have served with those of high degree,
Amongst lords of the highest estate,
Yet with them I never would debate.
I never contradicted them, truly;
I well know my lord knows more than me.
Whatever he says, I hold it to be right;
On the same, or something similar, I light.
A mighty fool is any councillor
Who serves a lord with high honour,
Yet dares presume, or consider he is fit
To offer advice that betters his lord's wit.
No, lords are not fools, no, by my faith!
You have shown yourself, here today
Of such noble thought, so holy and fine,
That I agree, endorse it all with mine,
All your words and all your true opinion.
By God, there is no man in all this town,
Nor in Italy, who could have spoken better!
Christ would be satisfied with every letter.
And truly it is a noble wish I say
For any man who is advanced in age
To take a young wife; by my father's kin,
Your heart's hanging from a trusty pin!
Do now in this matter as you wish,
For, in conclusion, I do think that best.'
  Justinus, who sat still and all this heard,
In this manner Placebo he answered:
'Now, my brother, be patient I pray,
Since you have spoken, hear now what I say.
  'Seneca, among other words, all wise,
Says indeed that a man is well advised
To ponder where he leaves his land and chattels.
And since therefore I ought to think right well
To whom I give my goods away, truly
I should consider still more carefully
To whom I give my body for many a day,
I warn you truly now, it's no child's play

To marry without due consideration.
Men must enquire – this is my opinion –
If she be wise, sober or drunken too,
Or proud, or else otherwise a shrew,
A chider, or a waster of your goods,
Rich or poor, a virago from the woods –
Although it's true as ever no man shall
Find any in this world sound in all,
No man, no beast that man could devise.
But nonetheless, it ought to suffice
For any wife, that one know if she had
More good qualities than she had bad.
And all this needs leisure to enquire.
For, God knows, I have wept tears entire
Days, privately, since I have had a wife.
Praise who will a married man's life,
Be sure, I find in it but cost and care,
And duty, of all bliss and joy bare.
And yet, God knows, my neighbours all about,
And especially the women, I avow,
Say that I have a most constant wife,
And the meekest one that God gave life.
But I know best where pinches thus the shoe.
You can do, for my part, what pleases you.
Take thought – you are mature now in age –
Before you enter into any marriage,
Especially with a wife both young and fair.
By Him that made water, earth, and air,
The youngest man there is among the crowd
Is hard put to ensure, if he's allowed,
His wife for himself alone. Trust in me,
You shall not please her fully years three –
That is to say, or give her satisfaction.
A wife demands plenty of attention.
With what I said, be not displeased I pray.'
'Well, quoth January, 'have you had your say?
That for your Seneca and your proverbs!

I care not a basketful of herbs
For scholar's terms! Wiser men than thou,
As you know well, have assented now,
To my scheme. Placebo what say ye?'
'I say it is a cursed man,' quoth he,
'Indeed, who hinders true matrimony.'
And with that word they rose, suddenly,
And they assented fully that he should
Be wedded when he wished, and where he would.
Powerful imaginings, fresh anxiousness,
From day to day, full on the spirit pressed
Of January, concerning all this marriage.
Many a fair shape, many a fair visage,
There passed through his heart, night by night,
As one who took a mirror, polished bright,
And set it there in the public market-place,
Would see many a reflected figure pace
Across his mirror; and in similar wise
Could January in his own mind devise
Images of maids who dwelt on every side.
He was unsure where preference should abide;
For if the one had beauty in her face,
Another stood so in the people's grace
For her sobriety and benignity,
That in folk's report most worth had she;
And others were rich, but had a bad name.
Nonetheless, between earnest and game,
He, in the end, had fixed his mind on one,
And every other from his heart was gone,
And he chose her, on his own authority;
For love is blind always, and cannot see.
And when at night he his bed had sought,
He portrayed her in his heart and thought,
Her fresh beauty, and her age so tender,
Her little waist, her arms long and slender,
Her wise discipline, and her gentleness,
Her womanly bearing and her soberness.

And when to look on her he condescended,
He thought his choice could never be amended.
For when all this he concluded had,
He thought every other man's wits so bad,
It would be for them an impossibility
To contest his choice; that was his fantasy.
His friends he sent to on the instant,
And begged them to honour his intent
Asking them swiftly to him now to come;
He would abridge their labour, all and some.
There was no further need for them to ride;
He'd decided where his choice would abide.
  Placebo came, his friends were all there soon,
And first of all he begged of them a boon,
That none should any ill contention make
Against the decision that he chose to take;
Which decision was pleasant to God, said he,
And the very grounds of his prosperity.
  He said there was a maiden in the town,
Who for her beauty had won great renown,
Although it chanced she was of low degree,
It sufficed for him she had youth and beauty;
Which maid, he said, he would take to wife,
And lead in ease and holiness his life,
And thanked God that he would have her all,
And no man should share his bliss at all,
And begged them to pander to his need,
And make sure that his courtship succeed,
For then, he said, his mind would be at ease.
'There is,' quoth he, 'nothing to displease,
Except one thing pricking in my conscience,
The which I will rehearse in your presence.
  I have,' quoth he, 'heard said, a year ago,
No man can have perfect bliss, in both –
That is to say, in earth and then in heaven.
For though he keep him from the sins seven,
And from every branch, too, of that tree,

Yet is there such perfect felicity
And such great ease and joy in marriage,
That ever I am aghast now, at my age,
That I may lead now so merry a life,
Luxurious, and free of woe and strife,
That I shall have my heaven on earth here.
And yet since heaven indeed is bought so dear,
With tribulation and with mighty penance,
How should I then, living a life so pleasant,
As all married men do with their wives,
Come to bliss where Christ eternal thrives?
This is my dread; and you my brethren, say,
You two, how to resolve this question, pray.'
  Justinus, who hated all such folly,
Answered at once, in silent mockery;
And as he would a longer tale abridge,
He would no clear authority allege,
But said: 'Sire, if there's no obstacle
Other than this, God, by a miracle
And of his mercy, may for you so work.
That ere you have the rites of holy church
You may repent of the married man's life,
In which you say there is no woe or strife.
And God forbid He do ought but send
The married man the grace to repent
Much more often than the single man!
And therefore, sire, the best advice I can
Give you, despair not, but keep in memory
That she perhaps may prove your purgatory.
She may be God's means, and God's whip;
Then shall your soul up to Heaven skip
Swifter than does the arrow from the bow.
I hope to God hereafter you may know
That there is none so great a felicity
In marriage, nor nevermore shall be,
That could deprive you of your salvation,
Provided you use, with skill and reason,

The pleasures of your wife, temperately,
And that you please her not too amorously,
And that you keep from every other sin.
My advice is done, for my wits are thin.
Be not aghast at it all, my brother dear,
And let us turn from this matter here.
The Wife of Bath, if you can understand
Her view of the business we've on hand,
Has declared it clearly in little space.
Farwell now; God have you in His grace.'
  And with that Justinus and his brother
Took their leave, and each one of the other.
For when they saw that it needs must be,
They so wrought, by wise and cunning treaty,
That this maiden, named fair May, she might
As swiftly as ever should appear right,
Be wedded to this old man January.
I think too long you'd need to tarry,
If I told you of every deed and bond
By which she was endowed with his land,
Or to detail all her rich array.
But finally we reach the wedding day
And to the church both of them now went
There to receive the holy sacrament.
Forth the priest, with stole about his neck, there,
And bade her be like Sarah and Rebecca,
In wisdom and in the truth of marriage,
And said the orisons, in common usage,
Signed them with the cross, and bade God bless,
And made all sure enough with holiness.
  Thus were they wedded with solemnity,
And down to the feast sit he and she,
With other worthy folk on the dais.
All full of joy and bliss is the place,
And full of instruments, and plenty,
The most delicious food in all Italy.
Before them stood instruments whose sound

Was such that Orpheus, nor Amphion
Ever made such a perfect melody.
With every course there came loud minstrelsy
That never trumpet blared with Joab near,
Nor Thiodomas, never was half so clear,
At Thebes when the city was in doubt.
Bacchus himself poured wine all about,
And Venus smiled sweetly at the sight,
For January had become her knight,
And now would test out all his courage
As he had done in liberty, in marriage,
And with her firebrand in her hand about,
Danced before the bride and all the rout.
And for sure, I dare in truth say this:
Hymen that the god of marriage is,
Never saw so merry a married man.
Hold your peace, now, poet Marcian,
Who describes that same wedding merry
Of Philology the bride, to Mercury,
And then writes the songs the Muses sung!
Too shallow your pen, too weak your tongue,
To tell the story of this marriage.
When tender youth is wed to stooping age,
There is such mirth it can't be written.
Try it yourself, and you'll be bitten,
Tell me if I lie, in this matter here.
  May sat: her looks were so benign and clear,
To see her was to see the world of faery.
Queen Esther never looked so meekly
On Ahasuerus, never such eye had she.
I may not tell you of all her beauty;
But this much of her beauty tell I may,
That she was like the bright morn of May,
Filled with every beauty was her glance.
  Old January was ravished, in a trance
Every time he looked upon her face.
But in his mind he menaced her apace

With how that night in his arms he'd strain
Her tighter than Paris Helen did constrain.
But nonetheless, he felt it a great pity
That he must offend her that night, and he
Thought to himself: 'Alas, O tender creature,
Now would to God that you may endure
All my passion, so sharp and keen, again
I am aghast lest you shall it not sustain.
God forbid that I do all that I might!
Would God though that it were truly night,
And the night last for evermore, and so
I wish these people were about to go!'
And finally he set himself to labour
As best he could, while careful of his honour,
To hasten them from the meal in subtle wise.
  The moment came when it was time to rise,
And after that they danced and drank, at last
Spices all about the house they cast,
And full of joy and bliss was every man –
All but a squire whose name was Damian,
Who carved for the knight full many a day.
He was so taken with this lady May
He was nigh mad with the pains of love.
He almost swooned and fainted where he stood,
So sore had Venus hurt him with her brand
That she bore, while she was dancing, in her hand.
And took himself off to bed hastily;
Of him no more at this time will I speak,
But leave him there to weep and to complain,
Till fresh May shall take pity on his pain.
  O perilous fire, that in the bed-straw gathers!
O household foe, who his ill service proffers!
O treacherous servant, with false homely hue,
An adder in the bosom, sly, untrue!
God shield us all from your base acquaintance.
O January, drunken in the dance
Of marriage, see how your Damian

Your own squire, from birth that was your man,
Intends to do you now some villainy.
God grant that this household foe you see!
For in this world there's no worse pestilence
Than a household foe daylong in your presence.
  Perfected had the sun his arc diurnal;
No longer might the body of him sojourn,
All on the horizon in that latitude.
Night with her mantle that is dark of hue
Had overspread the hemisphere about,
At which departed all the merry rout
Of guests, and with thanks on every side.
Home to their houses merrily they ride,
Where they do whatever they think best,
And when it seems due time, take their rest.
  Soon after that, our restless January
Desires his bed; he will no longer tarry.
He takes hippocras, and sweet wine laced
With spices hot, to make the spirits race,
And many a potion drinks he, as fine
As those the cursed monk Constantine,
Has written of in his book *De Coitu*;
He quaffed them all and nothing did eschew.
And to his private friends thus said he:
'For God's love, as soon as it may be,
Have the house cleared in courteous wise.'
And they did exactly as he did advise;
Men drank a toast, the curtains then were drawn,
The bride was brought abed, as still as stone;
And when the bed had by the priest been blessed,
Out of the chamber everybody pressed.
  And January fast in his arms did take
His fresh May, his paradise, his mate.
He calms her, he kisses her full oft;
And with the bristles of his beard un-soft,
Like to dog-fish scales, and sharp as briars –
For he has freshly shaved as it transpires –

He rubs her all about her tender face,
And says thus: 'Alas, my spouse, for a space
I must injure you, and greatly you offend,
Before the morning when we shall descend.
  But nonetheless, consider this,' quoth he,
'There is no workman, whosoever he be,
That can work well, and also hurriedly.
This must be done at leisure, carefully.
It matters not now how long now we play;
Coupled in wedlock were we two today
And blessed be the yoke that we are in,
For in our actions we can do no sin.
A man can commit no sin with his wife,
No more than hurt himself with his own knife,
For we have leave to play, so says the law.'
Thus he laboured till daylight, as before,
And then he took some bread in spiced wine,
And upright in his bed sat so to dine,
And after that he sang out loud and clear,
And kissed his wife, and wanton did appear.
He was all coltish, folly in his eye,
And full of chatter as a pert magpie.
The slack of skin below his neck did shake
While he chanted, bawled, and song did make.
God knows what poor May thought in her heart,
When she saw him in his shirt upstart,
And in his night-cap, with his neck all lean;
She thought his dalliance not worth a bean.
  Then said he thus: 'My rest shall I take
Now day is come; I cannot keep awake.
And down he laid his head and slept till prime.
And afterward, when he thought it time,
Up rose January; but fresh May
Kept to her chamber till the fourth day,
As wives do, they think it for the best.
For every labourer must sometimes rest,
Or else the labour may not long endure –

That is to say, of any living creature,
Be it of fish or bird or beast or man.
  Now will I speak of woeful Damian,
Who languishes for love, as you shall hear.
Therefore I'd speak to him in this manner:
I'd say: 'O foolish Damian, alas!
Answer my question, in this pretty pass:
How shall you to your lady, fresh May,
Tell your woe? She will ever say you nay.
And if you speak she will your woe betray.
God be your help! That's all that I can say.'
  This sick-hearted Damian in Venus' fire
So burned that he was dying of desire,
And so he chose to put his life at venture.
No longer could he in this wise endure;
But secretly a pen-case he did borrow,
And in a letter wrote out all his sorrow,
In the form of a plaint or of a lay
Unto his fair and fresh lady May.
And in a purse of silk hung it with art
Inside his shirt, laid against his heart.
  The moon in two degrees, at noon, the day
That January wedded his fresh May,
Of Taurus, into Cancer now had ridden
So long had May in her chamber hidden,
As is the custom with these nobles all.
A bride should never eat in the hall
Until four days, or three at the least
Have passed; then she may go and feast.
The fourth day complete from noon to noon,
When the high Mass was over and done,
In the hall sat January and May,
As fresh as is the bright summer's day.
And so it befell that this good man
Recalled his faithful squire Damian,
And said: 'Saint Mary, how may this be,
That Damian attends not here on me?

Is he sick, or what else may betide?'
His squires, who stood there by his side,
Excused him on the grounds of sickness,
Which excluded him from any business;
No other cause would make him tarry.
'Sorry I am for that,' quoth January,
'He is a noble squire, a gentle youth.
If he should die, 'twere pity then, in truth.
He is as wise, as secret and discrete
As any of his rank whom you may meet,
And courteous too, willing to serve at table,
And to be a worthy man he is right able.
But after meat, as soon as ever I may,
I will visit him myself, and so shall May,
To give him all the comfort that I can.'
And, at his words, blessed him every man,
That of his nobility and his kindness
He would go comfort in his sickness
His squire, for it was a gentle deed.
'Dame,' quoth this January, 'take good heed,
That after meat you, with your women all,
When you reach your chamber from this hall,
Go along and see our Damian.
And entertain him; he's a gentleman.
And tell him I shall pay him a visit,
When I have rested for a little bit.
And speed you fast, for I will abide
Until you sleep soundly by my side.'
And with those words he began to call
For the squire who was marshal of his hall,
And told him certain things that he wished.
Fresh May straight made her way after this,
With all her women, to see Damian.
Down by his bed she sat, and began
To comfort him as well as she may.
Damian, saw his chance, as there he lay,
And secretly his purse and his petition,

In which he had told of his condition,
He put into her hand with nothing more
Than a sigh both wondrous deep and sore,
And softly, to her, right thus said he:
'Mercy, and do thou not expose me,
For I am dead if this thing be espied!'
The purse she does in her bosom hide,
And goes her way – of that no more from me!
But unto January comes she finally,
Who on his bedside sits full soft
And clasps her then and kisses her full oft,
Then lays him down to sleep, and that anon.
She pretended she must needs be gone
Where everyone we know must go at need.
And when she of the note had taken heed,
She rent it all to pieces at the last,
And into the privy softly did it cast.
  Who deliberates but fair fresh May?
Adown by old January she lay,
Who slept till his cough woke him abed.
Then he begged her strip herself naked;
He would, he said, take pleasure at a chance;
And said he found her clothes an encumbrance.
And she obeyed, whether she would or not.
But lest prudish folk be me with wrath,
How that he wrought, that I dare not tell,
Nor whether she thought it paradise or hell,
But here I leave them working in their wise,
Till evensong when they were due to rise.
  Whether by destiny, or at a venture,
By starry influence, or merely nature,
Or by some configuration of aspects straight,
The heavens then appeared more fortunate
To present petitions full of Venus' works –
For each thing has its time, so say the clerks –
To any woman to obtain her love,
I cannot say; but the great God above,

Who knows that no event is causeless,
Let Him judge all, for my pen will rest.
But true it is, that on our fresh May
Such was the impression made that day
By him, and by her pity for Damian,
That from her heart there is no way she can
Drive out the need to do him ease.
'And then,' she thought, 'whoever it displease,
I care not; for I shall him assure
That I will love him best of any creature
Though but his shirt has he, at the start.'
Lo, pity swiftly flows in gentle heart!
  Here may you see the generosity
Of woman, when she ponders carefully.
Some there may be, many such are known,
Tyrants with a heart as hard as stone,
That would have seen him perish in that place,
Rather than granting him a moment's grace,
And rejoiced then in their cruel pride,
Careless of being thought a homicide.
  But gentle May, filled full of pity,
In her own hand a letter wrote she,
In which she granted him her true grace.
There only lacked the time and place,
That might, to satisfy his wish, suffice;
For it must be just as he would devise.
And when she saw her chance one day,
To visit our Damian went May,
And surreptitiously the letter thrust
Under his pillow – read it then he must.
She took him by the hand and gave a squeeze,
So secretly that no one else could see,
And bade him be well; and off she went
To January when for her he sent.
  Up rose Damian the next morrow;
All past was his sickness and his sorrow.
He combed his hair; groomed himself and dressed;

He did all that his lady might like best.
And then to January as meek does go
As ever a dog following the bow.
He is so pleasant to every man –
Being sly does all, for those who can –
That everyone spoke well of him, who should,
And fully in his lady's grace he stood.
Thus I leave Damian, busy with his need,
And in my tale forth I will proceed.
  Some scholars hold that felicity
Consists in pleasure, and certainly,
This noble January, with all his might,
In honest ways, as became a knight,
Set out to live most luxuriously.
His household, his dress, was as finely
Tailored to his degree as is a king's.
And amongst the rest of his fine things,
He had a garden, walled all with stone;
So fair a one, I'd say, was never known.
For sure, I would not easily suppose
That he who wrote the Romance of the Rose
Could capture its beauty to the life;
Nor would Priapus himself suffice,
Though he is god of gardens, to tell
The beauty of that garden, and the well
That stood beneath a laurel, always green.
Many a time had Pluto and his Queen
Proserpina, and all her band of faery,
Sported there and made their melody
About the well, and danced, or so men hold.
  This noble knight, January the old,
Took such delight in walking there, that he
Would suffer no one else to have the key
Save he himself; for of the small wicket
He bore the silver key that would unlock it,
Which, when he wished, he often did do.
And when he would pleasure his wife too,

In summer season, thither would he go,
With May his wife, so none would know.
And anything they had not done in bed,
Was done in the garden there instead.
And in this wise many a merry day
Lived this January and fresh May.
But worldly joy may not always endure,
For January, or for any other creature.
  O sudden chance, O Fortune the unstable,
Like the scorpion endlessly deceitful,
Feigning with your head when you would sting,
Your tail is death, through your envenoming!
O fragile joy, O sweet venom's taint!
O Monster that so subtly can paint
Your gifts with the hue of steadfastness,
So that you deceive both great and less!
Why have you January thus deceived?
You had him as your true friend received,
And now have bereft him of his sight –
For sorrow of which he would die tonight.
  Alas, noble January, the worthy,
Amidst his pleasure and prosperity
Is stone blind, and that quite suddenly.
He weeps and he wails piteously;
And with it comes the fire of jealousy,
Lest his wife should fall into some folly,
That so burns his heart he would again
Prefer some man both her and him had slain.
For neither after his death nor in his life
Would he have her a lover or a wife,
But as a widow live, clothes black as fate,
Solitary as the dove that's lost its mate.
But after a month or two had passed away,
His sorrow began to ease, truth to say.
For when he saw that nothing else could be,
In patience he accepted adversity;
Save that, indeed, he had not foregone

His jealousy: in that all days seemed one.
Which jealousy of his was so outrageous
That not to the hall, or any other house,
Nor to any other place here below,
Would he suffer her to ride or go
Unless he had his hand on her always.
At which treatment often wept fresh May,
Who loved Damian so graciously,
That she must either die suddenly,
Or else must have him: at the worst,
She thought her very heart would burst!
  And on his side, Damian was then
One of the most sorrowful of men,
That ever was, for neither night nor day,
Might he speak one word to his fresh May,
And as to his purpose no such matter,
For January would overhear their chatter,
Who had his hand upon her, as you know.
Yet nonetheless, by writing to and fro,
And secret signs, he knew what she meant,
And she knew too the gist of his intent.
  O January, what would it you avail
Though you could see as far as a ship's sail?
As well be blind, and then deceived be
As be deceived when the eye can see.
  Lo, Argus, who had a hundred eyes,
For all that ever he could peer or pry,
Yet was he blind; and many more, God knows,
Who thought for certain that it was not so.
I'll pass on, in relief, and say no more.
  Fresh May, whom I've spoken of before,
In warm wax impressed the key, her mate
Old January carried, of the little gate
By which into his garden he oft went.
And Damian, who knew all her intent,
Forged a counterfeit, all secretly.
There is no more to say, but presently

A wonder will occur thanks to this gate,
That you shall hear about, if you will wait.
  O noble Ovid, you spoke true, God knows!
What stratagem is there, despite its woes
Love will not in its own way discover?
In Pyramas and Thisbe see the manner:
Though they were strictly watched overall,
They made a plan, by whispering through a wall,
No one could have guessed their cunning ways.
  But to our purpose now: before eight days
Had passed, ere the month of June, it befell,
January so desired – his wife did well
For she had egged him on – to go and play,
In the garden, and no one there but they,
That one morning unto his May said he:
'Rise up, my wife, my love, my lady free!
Hear the turtle-dove, my sweet, my pet,
Winter is gone with all its cold and wet.
Come forth, now, with those dove's eyes of thine!
How much more lovely are your breasts than wine!
The garden is enclosed all about;
Come forth my white spouse! Out of doubt,
You have wounded me in my heart, O wife;
There is no stain on you, on my life.
Come forth, and let us enjoy our sport;
I chose you for my wife, and my comfort.'
– Lewd words, from an ancient text, used he.
  To Damian a signal then made she
That he should go before them and wait.
So Damian went and opened up the gate,
And in he slid, and that in such a manner
That no one saw him, or heard him, there;
And he sat still, under a bush, alone.
  Old January, as blind as is a stone,
Holding May's hand, and walking so,
Into the fresh garden he did go,
And clapped the wicket to, and firmly.

'Now wife,' quoth he, 'here's only you and me,
You are the creature that I best love.
For, by the Lord that sits in Heaven above,
I would rather perish by the knife,
Than offend you, my true dear wife!
For God's sake, consider how I chose
You, not from covetousness, suppose,
But only for the love I bore to thee.
And though I am old and cannot see,
Be true to me, and I will tell you why.
Three things, surely, shall you win thereby:
First, love of Christ, and to yourself honour,
And all my property, of town and tower,
I give you – draw the deeds up, as is best,
We'll sign tomorrow, ere sun goes to rest,
As God Himself may bring my soul to bliss!
I pray that first, to seal it, you me kiss.
And though I may be jealous, blame me not;
You are so deep imprinted in my thought
That when I consider of your beauty,
And then the ill-matched age of me,
I may not, for certain, though it kill me,
Bear to be out of your company
For love, indeed; I say without a doubt.
Now kiss me wife, and let us roam about.'
Fresh May, when she these words heard,
Graciously January she then answered;
But first and foremost she began to weep.
'I have,' quoth she, 'a soul from sin to keep
As well as you, and also my own honour,
And of my wifehood too the tender flower.
Which that I entrusted to your hand,
When the priest to you my body bound.
Wherefore I will answer in this manner,
By your leave, I pray, my lord so dear:
I pray to God that never dawns the day
Or may I die as foul as woman may,

That ever I bring my kin that shame,
Or else so impair my own good name
As to be false; and if I do, alack,
Strip me then and put me in a sack,
And in the next river do me drench.
I am a gentlewoman and no wench!
Why speak you so? – But men are ever untrue,
And women are forever blamed by you.
You've no other way of speech, I believe,
But talk distrust, reproach to us, to grieve.'
  And as she spoke, she saw where Damian,
Sat in the bushes, and coughing she began,
With her fingers, to make signs, that she
Wished Damian to climb into a tree
Which was charged with fruit, and up he went;
For truly he knew all of her intent,
And every sign she made, as I relate,
Better than January who was her mate,
For in a letter she had told him all,
Of this matter, and how it might befall.
And thus I leave him sitting in the pear-tree,
And January and May roaming merrily.
  Bright was the day, and blue the firmament;
Phoebus his streams of gold downward sent
To gladden every flower with his warmness.
He was at that time in Gemini, I guess,
But little way from greatest declination
In Cancer which is Jupiter's exaltation.
And so it befell, that bright morning-tide,
That in that garden on the farther side
Pluto, who is the King of Faery,
And many a lady of his company,
Following his wife, Queen Proserpina,
Whom he once ravished out of Etna,
While she gathered flowers in the mead –
In Claudian the story you may read,
How in his dreadful chariot he her snatched –

This King of Faery then adown him sat
Upon a bench of turf, fresh and green.
And right anon thus said he to his Queen:
'My wife,' quoth he, 'no one can gainsay,
For experience proves it so, every day,
The treachery that woman shows to man.
Ten hundred thousand tales tell I can,
Recorded, of your untruth and lightness.
O Solomon, wise and richest in riches,
Full of sapience and worldly glory,
Your words are fit to be held in memory,
By every man of wit, who reason can!
Thus you praised the goodness of man:
"Among a thousand men I yet found one,
But among women all I found none."
– So says the king who knew your wickedness.
And Jesus, Son of Sirach, I suggest,
Seldom says aught of you in reverence.
A wild fire and corrupting pestilence
Fall upon your bodies then tonight!
See you not how this honourable knight,
Because, alas, he is now blind and old,
His own servant shall render him cuckold?
Look, where he sits, the lecher in the tree!
Now will I grant, of my great majesty,
Unto this old, blind, worthy knight,
That he shall have again his true eyesight,
And when his wife would do him villainy.
Thus shall he know all of her harlotry,
Both a reproach to her, and others woe.'
'You will?' quoth Proserpine, 'And will you so?
Now by my mother's sire's soul I swear,
That I shall give her sufficient answer here,
And every woman after, for her sake –
And though they be caught in their mistake,
With bold face their guilt they shall excuse,
And bear him down who would them accuse.

For lack of answer none of them shall die.
Though a man see it with his naked eye,
Yet shall we women outface him boldly,
And weep, and swear, and scold subtly,
So that men look as foolish as do geese.
  What care I for your authorities?
I know well that this Jew, this Solomon,
Found fools among us women, many a one.
But though he discovered no good woman,
Yet were there found by many another man
Women true, and good, and virtuous.
Witness all those that dwell in Christ's house:
With martyrdom they proved their constancy.
The Roman tales preserve the memory
Of many a true and constant wife also.
But sire, be not wrath though it be so,
Though he said he found no good woman;
I pray you, know the meaning of the man:
He meant thus, that supreme constancy
Belongs to God alone, not he or she.
  Ay, for God indeed why take such a one,
And make so much of your Solomon?
What though he made a Temple, God's House?
What though he were rich and glorious?
Thus made he a temple for the false gods!
What could he do that more outrageous was?
Oh, though you may whiten him with plaster,
He was a lecher still, and an idolater,
And in his old age he the Lord forsook.
And if God had not, so says the Book,
Spared him for his father's sake, he would
Have lost his kingdom sooner than he should.
I set at naught all the villainy you cry
Of women, it's not worth a butterfly!
I am a woman; and must have my say,
Or else I'll swell till my heart shall break.
For since he has said we're villainesses,

As ever I shall live to shake my tresses,
I shall not refrain, out of false courtesy
To speak him harm that does us villainy.'
  'Dame,' quoth Pluto, 'be no longer wrath;
I yield! But since I swore a sacred oath
That I would grant him his sight again,
My word shall stand: this I tell you plain.
I am a king; it is not meet I lie.'
  'And' quoth she, 'the Queen of Faery, I!
An answer shall she have, I'll undertake.
Let us have no more words, for my sake;
For now I will no longer be contrary.'
   So let us turn again to January,
Who in the garden still with his fair May
Sings more merrily than a popinjay,
'You love I best, and shall, and other none.'
So long about the alleys is he gone
Till he is come again to that pear-tree
Where Damian is sitting merrily,
On high among the fresh leaves so green.
  And then fresh May, the bright and serene,
Began to sigh, and said: 'Alas, my side!
Now, sire,' quoth she, 'whatever may betide,
I must have one of the pears I see,
Or I must die; I long so utterly
To eat one of those small pears, so green.
Help, for Her love that is of Heaven Queen!
I tell you, sire, a woman in my plight
May have for fruit so great an appetite,
That without it she'll go to her grave.'
  'Alas!' quoth he, 'that I have not a knave
To climb up, here! Alas! Alas! quoth he,
'That I am blind.' 'No matter, sire,' quoth she;
'Yet if you'd vouchsafe, for God's sake,
The pear-tree now in your arms to take –
For I know well how you mistrust me –
Then I could climb it well enough,' quoth she,

'If I could set my foot upon your back.'
'Certainly,' quoth he, 'you shall not lack,
Had I to aid you with my own heart's-blood.'
He stooped down, and on his back she stood,
And caught hold of a branch, and up she goes –
Ladies, I pray you, be not wrath, suppose
Me uncultured, I speak as best I can –
And suddenly anon, this Damian
Pulls up her smock, and in he's gone.
And when Pluto saw this shameful wrong,
To January he gave again his sight,
And let him see as plain as ever he might.
And when he had his vision back again,
Never was man more happy, that is plain.
But on his wife his thought was fixed too;
And up to the tree he cast his eyes two,
And saw that Damian his wife addressed
In such a manner it may not be expressed,
Unless I were to speak discourteously.
He gave a roar and shouted out as loudly,
As a mother does if a child should die.
'Out, help! Rape! Alas!' he began to cry,
'O brazen lady bold, what do you do?'
And she answered: 'Sire, what troubles you?
Be patient and be rational of mind.
I've helped to doctor both your eyes blind;
On peril of my soul, without a lie,
I was told that for healing of the eye
Nothing was better: it would make you see,
If I struggled with a man up in a tree.
God knows, I did it all with good intent.'
'Struggle!' quoth he, 'yes, and in it went!
God send you both a shameful death to die!
He had you: I saw it clearly with my eye,
Let me be hanged by the neck or else!'
'Then,' quoth she, 'is my remedy false;
For certainly if you could truly see,

You would not utter these same words to me.
You have some vision, yet not perfect sight.'
'I see,' quoth he, 'as well as ever I might,
Thanks be to God, with both my eyes so!
And by my troth, I think he did you though.'
'You're dazed, dazed, good sire,' quoth she,
'These are the thanks for curing you, I see!
Alas,' quoth she, 'that ever I proved so kind!'
'Well dame,' quoth he, 'erase it from your mind.
Come down, my love, and if I may have said
Aught wrong, God help me, forgive instead.
But by my father's soul I thought I saw
That Damian enjoy you, and what's more
Your smock was gathered round your breast.'
'You, sire,' quoth she, 'may think as suits you best.
But sire, a man that wakes out of his sleep,
Cannot grasp all at once the things he sees,
And cannot see what he looks on perfectly,
Until he has awakened more completely.
And so a man that has been blind, well he
May not all at once, nor clearly, see
When his new sight has first come again,
As he that has a day or two seen plain.
Till your sight has settled for a while,
Full many a sight may you still beguile.
Be careful, I pray, by Heaven's King,
Many a man believes he sees a thing,
And finds it different to what it seems.
He who misperceives, chases dreams.'
– And with that she leaped down from the tree.
And January, who so glad as he?
He kissed her, embracing her full oft,
And her belly stroked he then full soft,
And to the house he lead her then, I'll add.
Now good men, I pray you all be glad;
Thus ends here my tale of January;
God bless us, and his mother too, Saint Mary!

Here ends the Merchant's Tale of January

The Merchant's Epilogue

'Ey, God's mercy,' said our Host, 'Lo,
God keep me from such a wife, though!
See what cunning tricks and subtleties
These women use; ever busy as bees
They are, us foolish men to deceive.
And from the truth ever away will weave;
This Merchant's tale does the proof reveal.
For without doubt, as true as any steel
I have a wife, though poor she may be.
But of her tongue a blabbing shrew is she;
And she has a heap more of vices, know.
But no more of that – let such things go!
Yet know you what? – In secret be it said –
I sorely rue the day that we were wed.
Though, if I were to reckon every vice
She has, it were a foolish exercise.
And why? Because it would reported be,
And told to her, by some in this company –
By whom, there is no need now to declare,
Since women know how to show such wares.
Also my wits suffice them not to tell you
All the tale; wherefore my tale is through.'

The end of the Merchant's Epilogue

THE SQUIRE'S PROLOGUE

THE PROLOGUE TO THE SQUIRE'S TALE

' quire, come near, if your wish it be,
And speak somewhat of love, for certainly
You know as much of it as any man.'
'Nay, sire,' quoth he, 'but what I can
I will right heartily, I'll not rebel
Against your wish; a tale will I tell.
Excuse me, if I should speak amiss.
My intent is good; lo, my tale is this.'

The Squire's Tale

Here begins the Squire's Tale

t Sarai, in the land of Tartary,
There dwelt a king who warred with Muscovy,
In which wars died many a mighty man.
This noble king was called Cambiuskan,
Who in his time was of such great renown
That there was nowhere in no region found
So excellent a lord in everything.
He lacked naught that does befit a king.
As to the sect in which he had been born,
He kept the law, to serve which he had sworn;
Added to this he was wise, brave and rich,
And merciful, and just, constantly fixed
On truthful speech, benign and honourable,
As firmly set as the centre of a circle,
Young, fresh and strong, he war espoused
As keenly as any true knight of his house.
A fair person he was and fortunate,
And ever so maintained his royal state
That there was nowhere such another man.
This noble king, this Tartar, Cambiuskan,
Had two sons by Elpheta his wife;
The eldest of the two named Algarsife,
The other son in turn called Cambalo.
A daughter had this noble king also,
Youngest of all; her name was Canace.
But to tell you of all her beauty,
Lies not in my tongue nor understanding.

I dare not undertake so great a thing;
My English too would prove insufficient.
Only a rhetorician, excellent
In all the frills belonging to that art,
Could describe her to you in every part.
I am none; I must speak then as I can.
  And so befell it, when this Cambiuskan
Had twenty winters worn his diadem,
He held a feast, a custom among them,
To celebrate his own nativity
Which was proclaimed through Sarai city,
On the Ides of March, in the new year;
Phoebus the sun shone bright and clear,
For he was near his exaltation,
In Mars' face, and in his mansion
In Aries, the choleric hot sign.
Cheerful was the weather and benign,
So that the birds in the sun's gleam –
What with the season and the fresh green –
Full loudly sang out their affection.
Feeling they had at last won protection
Against the sword of winter, keen and cold.
  This Cambiuskan, of whom I have told,
In royal vestments sat on his dais,
With diadem, full high in his palace,
And held his feast, so solemn and so rich
That in this world there was none other which
Could match it: and if I told of its array,
Then would I occupy a summer's day;
Nor is there reason for me to advise
You of the order of the meal in any wise.
I'll not list the exotic dishes, swans
In any number, also young herons.
And in that land too, so say the knights old,
There are meats that men as dainties hold,
Though in this country their worth is small.
There is no man who could tell them all;

I will not delay you now, for it is prime,
It would be fruitless, simply wasted time;
To my initial theme, then, I'll have recourse.
It so befell that after the third course,
While the King in splendour sat, I say,
Listening to his minstrels sing and play
Before him at the table, delightfully,
In at the hall door, all suddenly,
There came a knight upon a horse of brass,
And in his hand a mirror, broad, of glass;
Upon his thumb he had a golden ring,
And by his side a naked sword hanging,
And up he rode to the King's high board.
In all the hall was spoken never a word
For wonder at this knight; him to behold
Full eagerly they waited, young and old.
The unknown knight who came thus suddenly,
All armed, save for his head, full richly,
Saluted King and Queen and lords all,
In order, as were seated through the hall,
With such deep reverence and obeisance,
As much in speech as in his countenance,
That Gawain, with his ancient courtesy,
Though he were come again, out of Faery,
Could not have bettered him in any word.
And after this, before the King's high board,
He in a manly voice proclaimed his message,
According to the manner of his language,
Without defect of syllable or letter.
And that his tale might appear the better,
As his words did, so did his face appear,
Like those who learn the art of speech here.
And though I cannot imitate his style,
Nor can I climb over so high a stile,
Yet say I this: as to the general intent,
What follows next adds up to what he meant –
If it be that I have it still in mind.

He said: 'The King of Araby and Inde,
My liege lord, upon this solemn day
Salutes you as best he can and may,
And sends you, in honour of your feast,
By me who am ready to serve your needs,
This horse of brass, that easily and well
Can in the space of one day natural –
That is to say, in four and twenty hours –
Wherever you wish, in drought or in showers,
Transport your body into every place
Where your heart wishes you to pace,
Without harming you, through foul and fair.
Or if you choose to fly as high in air
As an eagle does when he seeks to soar,
This same steed will bear you evermore,
Unharmed, till you are where you think best,
Though you sleep on his back or rest,
And return again, when you twist this pin.
Who wrought it knew many a cunning thing;
Through many a starry configuration
He waited to perform this operation,
And many a seal and bond did understand.
This mirror, too, that I have in my hand
Has such a power that a man may in it see
When will befall any adversity
Unto your kingdom, and to yourself also,
And openly who is your friend or foe.
And moreover, if any lady bright
Has set her heart on any manner of knight,
If he is false, she shall his treason see –
His new love and all his secrecy –
So clearly then, that he shall nothing hide.
Wherefore, again, this cheerful summer-tide,
The mirror and the ring that you can see
He has sent to my lady Canace,
Your excellent daughter sitting here.
The virtue of the ring, if you will hear,

Is this: that if she should choose to wear
It on her thumb, or in her purse it bear,
There is no bird flying in the heavens
Whose tongue she'll not understand as given,
And know its meaning openly and plain,
And answer it in its language once again;
And every herb that grows on its root,
She shall know too, and whom it will suit,
Although his wound be ever so deep and wide.
  This naked sword that hangs by my side
Such virtue has, that whoever shall you smite,
Through his armour it will carve and bite,
Though it were thick as is a branching oak.
And whoever is wounded by its stroke,
Shall never be whole till you choose, of grace,
To stroke him with the flat of it in the place
Where he is hurt; that's as much as to say
You must with the flat of the sword again
Stroke the wound and it will swiftly close.
This is the truth indeed, may all men know;
It will not fail while it is in your hold.'
  And when the knight had thus his tale told,
He rode out of the hall and did alight.
His horse that glittered as the sun so bright,
Stood in the courtyard, still as any stone.
The knight to a chamber was led alone,
His armour off, to the table then he sat.
  The gifts were carried, royally at that –
That is to say, the sword and the mirror –
In procession into the high tower,
By certain officers to this so sworn.
And unto Canace the ring was born
Solemnly, to where she sat at table.
But assuredly, without a touch of fable,
The horse of brass itself could not be moved,
It stands as if to earth it has been glued.
It cannot be stirred by any man alive

Though with pulley and windlass they may strive.
And why, then? – Because they lack the skill.
And therefore in that place they leave it still,
Until the knight shall teach them the manner
Of moving it, as you shall shortly hear.
  Great was the crowd that swarmed to and fro
To gaze at the horse that stood there so,
For it was that high, and broad and long,
And well proportioned, so that it was strong,
As if it had been a steed of Lombardy;
And withal so quick of eye and lively
As if it an Apulian courser were.
Indeed, from its tail up to its ear,
Nature and art could not the horse amend
For the better, so all said in the end.
But always the greatest wonder was
How it could move about if it were brass.
It was a work of faery, so it seemed.
Various folk, they variously scheme,
As many minds as heads, yet none agrees,
Murmuring as does a swarm of bees,
And think according to their fantasy,
Repeating fragments of old poetry,
Saying it is in truth like Pegasus,
Who fled through the air, the winged horse;
Or else like the Greek horse of Sinon,
That brought great Troy to its destruction,
As they had in the oldest stories read.
  'My heart,' quoth one, 'is evermore in dread;
I fear some men at arms lie there within,
Whose intent is this city for to win.
It would be well if we such things could know.'
Another whispered to his neighbour, low,
And said: 'He's wrong: it's rather, by my logic,
An apparition fashioned by some magic,
As tricksters conjure things, at feasts of state.'
Of sundry doubts they chatter, and debate

As the unknowing will do, commonly,
Regarding things fashioned far more subtly
Than they in their ignorance can comprehend;
Yet leap to the wrong conclusion in the end.
  And some of them marvelled at the mirror,
That had been carried to the master tower,
Wondering how men things in it could see.
Another answered and said it might well be
Naturally, and by combinations
Of angles and skilful reflections,
And said that in Rome was such a one,
They spoke of Witelo and Alhazen,
And Aristotle, who all left directives
Concerning curious mirrors and perspectives,
As men know who have their works explored.
  And other folk marvelled at the sword
That would pierce clear through everything,
And spoke of Telephus the Mysian king,
And of Achilles with his wondrous spear,
For he could wound and heal, as you may hear,
Just in the way that men may with this sword,
Of which right now heard our king and lord.
They spoke of clever tempering of metal,
And spoke of the agents to be used withal,
And how and when it should tempered be,
A thing unknown – at least it is to me.
  Then they spoke about Canace's ring,
And all conceded such a wondrous thing
Of ring-craft they had never heard, not one,
Except that Moses and King Solomon
Were said to have true knowledge of the art;
Thus said the people, gathering apart.
  And in addition, some declared, it was
Marvellous to make of fern-ash glass,
And yet glass is unlike the ash of fern,
Though since this was nothing new to learn,
Those soon ceased their chattering and wonder.

Some wonder just as deeply about thunder,
And ebb and flood, and gossamer, and mist,
And other things as long as doubts exist.
Thus they chatter, wrangle and advise,
Till the King from the table deigns to rise.
  Phoebus had left the line meridional,
And still ascending was the beast royal,
The noble Lion, and his star, Aldiran,
When the Tartar King, Cambiuskan,
Rose from the table, at which sat he.
Before him went the sound of minstrelsy
Till in the state room all men were present
Where sounded there diverse instruments
That it was heavenly for them to hear.
Then there danced sweet Venus' children dear,
For their Lady in the Fishes sat, on high,
And gazed on them with a friendly eye.
  The noble King was seated on his throne;
The unknown knight was fetched: he alone
Into the dance he goes with Canace.
Now is there revelling and jollity
That no dull man might easily devise!
He must have known of love in every guise,
And be a jovial man, as fresh as May,
Who could devise for you a like array.
  For who could describe for you the dances
So strange in form, the fresh countenances,
Such secret glances and dissimulations,
For dread of jealous men's observations?
No man but Lancelot, and he long dead.
Therefore I pass from all this joy, instead;
I say no more, but in their happiness
I leave them, till their supper they address.
  The steward orders spices, by and by,
And also wine, the minstrelsy's ally.
The ushers and the squires swiftly gone,
The spices and the wine arrive anon.

They eat and drink, and when that's at an end,
Unto the temple, as is right, they wend.
The service done, they feasted all the day.
What need to tell you of all this array?
Each man well knows, that at a king's feast
There's plenty for the greatest and the least,
And more dainties than are in my knowing.
After the supper went the noble King
To see the horse of brass, with a whole rout
Of lords and ladies gathered round about.
  Such marvelling was there at this horse of brass
That, since the great siege of Troy came to pass,
Where men marvelled at a horse also,
There was never such wonder here below.
But finally, the King asked the knight
The virtues of the courser, and its might,
And prayed him to explain its governance.
  The horse soon began to frisk and dance,
When the knight laid hand upon its rein,
And said: 'Sire, there's no more to explain
But, when you wish to ride off anywhere,
You turn the pin inserted in its ear,
Which I shall tell you of, between us two.
You must tell him the places to which you
Wish to go, or the country where you'd ride.
And when you reach a place where you would bide,
Bid him descend, then turn another pin –
For the action of the creature lies therein –
And he'll descend and execute your will.
And in that place he will bide, quite still;
Though all men to the contrary be sworn,
He cannot be dragged from there or drawn.
But if you choose to bid him hence be gone,
Turn the pin, and he will vanish anon
Out of every man and woman's sight,
Yet return once more, whether by day or night,
When you choose to summon him again,

In such a manner as I will explain
Between us two, and that full soon. Now you,
May ride when you wish; there's no more to do.'
  Informed as the King was, by the knight,
When he had grasped all in his mind aright
Both the manner and form of the whole thing,
Full glad and blithe, the fine and noble King
Repaired to his revels as before.
The bridle then into the tower they bore,
And kept it with his jewels, prized and dear;
The horse then vanished – how I am not clear –
Out of his sight; you get no more of me!
But thus I leave, in joy and jollity,
Cambuskian, with his lords a-feasting,
Till well nigh the day began to spring.

PART TWO

he nourisher of our digestion, Sleep,
Began to wink on them, and bade them keep
Note that much drink and labour must have rest.
And with a yawning mouth all there he kissed,
And told them all that sleep must have its hour,
For the humour of blood was now in power.
'Cherish your blood, Nature's friend,' quoth he.
They thanked him, yawning, by two and three,
And everyone began to seek their rest,
As sleep commanded, and all thought it best.
Their dreams shall not be told, or not by me;
Their heads were those of inebriety,
That fashions dreams with no significance,
They slept till it was prime, at a glance,
Or most of them – except for Canace.
She was quite temperate, as women be;
For of her father she had taken leave
To go and rest soon after it was eve –
She had no wish both pale and wan to be,
Nor jaded the next morn, for all to see –
And slept her first sleep, and then awoke.
For such a joy in her heart now spoke,
Telling of her curious ring and mirror,
That twenty times she had changed colour.
And in her sleep, due to the impression
The mirror made on her, she had a vision.
Wherefore she, ere the sun began to glide
Skywards, called the governess at her side,
And told her that she wished to rise.
This old woman, pleased to appear wise,

Being her governess, answered her anon,
And said: 'Madame, shall you be gone,
And where this early, folk are all at rest?'
'I will arise,' quoth she, 'I think it best
To sleep no longer, and to walk about.'
  The governess summoned then a great rout
Of women, and up they rose, ten or twelve.
And up rose fresh Canace herself,
As rosy and bright as does the new sun
That of the Ram has four degrees now run –
No higher was he when she ready was.
And forth she walked on an easy course,
Arrayed, as for the pleasant season sweet,
Lightly, to play and roam with idle feet,
And only five or six of her company,
By woodland path forth through the park goes she.
  The vapours rising from the earth abroad
Made the sun seem redder and full broad;
But nonetheless it was so fair a sight
That it made all their hearts soar with delight,
What with the new season and the morning,
And all the birds that she heard singing,
For right anon she knew what they all meant
By their songs, and all their true intent.
  The nub and gist of every tale that's told,
If it is hidden till desire grows cold
In those who've listened to what came before,
The savour passes: the longer it is the more,
Through an abundance of prolixity.
And for the same reason, it seems to me,
I should to the nub and gist now descend,
And make of her walking soon an end.
  Upon a tree, from drought as white as chalk,
Where Canace was idling on her walk,
There sat a falcon, over her head full high,
That with a piteous voice began to cry
Till all the wood resounded far and deep.

She had beaten herself so piteously
With both her wings, that the crimson blood
Ran crown to root of the tree on which she stood.
And ever and again she uttered cry and shriek,
And pricked and stabbed herself so with her beak
That there is never a tiger or cruel beast
That dwells in wood or forest deep at least,
That would not have wept, if weep it could,
For pity of her, shrieking where she stood.
For there was never yet a man alive –
If only I could the falcon well describe –
Who has heard of another of such fairness,
Both in her plumage and her nobleness
Of shape, and all things that might valued be.
A peregrine falcon she appeared to be,
From foreign lands; and ever, as she stood,
She swooned now and again for loss of blood,
Till she had well nigh fallen from the tree.
  The King's fair daughter, Canace,
Who on her finger wore the curious ring
By which she comrpehended everything
That any bird might in its language say,
And could give answer in the selfsame way,
Understood now what the falcon said,
And for pity of it was good as dead.
And to the tree she hastened rapidly,
And at the falcon gazed all mercifully,
And held her skirt out wide, for she knew
The falcon must fall from the branch too
When it next swooned, from the lack of blood.
A long while waiting there she stood,
Till at last she spoke in this manner here,
To the hawk, as you shall swiftly hear:
  'What is the reason, if you're free to tell,
That you so feel the furious pains of Hell?'
Quoth Canace to the hawk high above.
'Is it for sorrow at death or loss of love?

- For I think those the causes two below
That most may cause a noble heart woe.
Of other kinds of harm I need not speak,
For you yourself upon yourself harm wreak,
Which proves that it is either ire or dread
Provides the reason why you cried and bled,
Since I can see no other who does you chase.
For love of God, toward yourself show grace,
Or say how I may help? – For west or east
I never saw before now bird or beast
That behaved towards itself so piteously.
You slay me with your sorrow, verily,
I possess for you such great compassion.
For God's love, from the tree now come,
And as I am here a king's daughter true,
If that I in truth all the reason knew
For your distress, if it lay in my might,
I would ease it, before the fall of night,
So help me the great God of kin and kind!
And herbs I shall in plenty for you find,
To heal all your hurts, and that right swiftly.'
Then the falcon shrieked more piteously
Than before, and fell to the ground anon,
And lay in a swoon, dead and like a stone,
Till into her lap did Canace her take,
And she began from the swoon to wake.
And when that she out of her swoon awoke,
Then in her hawk's language thus she spoke:
'That pity flows readily in gentle heart,
Feeling its likeness in another's smart,
Is proved every day, as men may see,
As well by practice as authority,
For gentle heart reveals its gentleness.
I see indeed, you show for my distress
Compassion, now, my fair Canace,
Out of true womanly benignity
Nature in your character has set there.

And not in any hope my fate to better,
But replying to your generosity,
And so that others may be warned by me,
As by the puppy's punishment the lion,
For that reason and to that conclusion,
While I have opportunity and space,
I will confess my hurt, as I die apace.'
  And all the while the one her sorrow told,
The other wept, as if turned to water cold,
Until the falcon bade her to be still;
And with a sigh thus she spoke her will.
'Where I was bred – alas, that bitter day! –
And fostered on a rock of marble grey,
So tenderly that nothing troubled me,
I never knew a day's adversity
Till I could fly high beneath the sky.
There dwelt a male falcon close nearby,
Who seemed the well of all gentleness.
Yet was he full of treason and falseness,
That was cloaked so by a humble manner
And the hue of truth, beneath the banner
Of pleasantries, and his taking every pain,
That no one would have known how he could feign,
So deeply ingrained appeared his colours.
Just as a serpent lurks beneath the flowers
And waits the time its evil to commit,
Just so this God of Love's hypocrite
Did so with ceremony and obeisance,
Kept up appearances with due observance,
Consistent with the courtesies of love.
As in a tomb all seems fair above,
While beneath it is the corpse, as you know,
Such was this hypocrite, both hot and cold.
And in this way pursued he his intent,
That, save the fiend, none knew what he meant,
Till he so long had wept and complained,
And many a year his service to me feigned,

Until my heart, too merciful and foolish,
All innocent then of his crowned malice,
Fearful of his death, as it seemed to me,
Given his oaths, and from false security,
Granted him its love, on this condition:
That evermore my honour and renown
Be guaranteed, privately and apart.
That is to say, I gave him all my heart
According to his deserts, and all my thought –
God knew, and he, otherwise I would not –
Took his heart in exchange for mine, I say.
  But truth it is, and has been many a day,
A true man and a thief think not as one.
And when he saw that things so travelled on
That I had fully granted him my love,
In such manner as I have said above,
And given him my true heart as free
As he swore he had given his to me,
Anon this tiger, full of deceitfulness,
Fell on his knees, in devout humbleness,
With such deep reverence, seemed there
So like a noble lover in his manner,
So ravished, it appeared then, by joy
That neither Jason nor Paris at Troy –
Jason, I say? For sure, no other man
Since Lamech, he who at first began
To love two women, as was said of yore –
No never, since the first man was born,
Could man contrive the twenty thousandth part
Of the false sophistry of all his art,
None were worthy to lace his shoe,
When false duplicity was there to do,
Nor one who could pay thanks as he to me!
His manners were so heavenly to see
To any woman: were she ever so wise;
So painted he and polished to the eye
His speech as fine as was his countenance.

And I so loved him then for his obeisance,
And for the truth I thought was in his heart,
If there was anything that caused him smart,
However slight it was, I could ne'er resist
The pain, and felt how death my heart did twist.
And briefly, so far now this matter went,
That my will was his will's instrument;
That is to say, my will obeyed his will
In everything that was also reasonable,
Keeping the limits of my honour ever,
Never was anyone so dear, none dearer,
Than he to me, none shall be so, God knows.
This lasted longer than a year or so,
With I believing of him naught but good.
Yet finally, so at the last it stood,
That Fortune herself no longer wished him
To dwell in the same location I was in.
Whether I felt woe, is not in question;
I cannot give you any true description,
But one thing I'll say boldly, I
Know what the pain of death is thereby.
Such pain I felt, so deeply did I grieve.
Thus on that day of me he took his leave,
So sorrowfully too, I thought verily
That he had felt the hurt as deep as me,
When I heard him speak, saw his pale hue.
For despite all, I thought that he was true,
And also thought that he'd return again
Within a little while, I should explain –
And there were reasons why he had to go
Matters of honour: it often happens so –
So I made virtue of necessity,
And took it well, since thus it had to be.
As I best might, I hid from him my sorrow,
And took his hand, Saint John keep all us so,
And said to him thus: "Lo, I am yours, in all.
Be such as I have been to you, evermore."

What he replied, I need not now rehearse.
Who spoke better than him? Who acted worse?
After he'd spoken well, came evil soon!
Therefore is she in need of a long spoon,
Who sups with the devil; so I've heard say.
Well, in the end he set forth on his way,
And forth he fled, till where it pleased him best
He chose a place, and there he took his rest.
  I think he must have had this text in mind,
That "everything according to its own kind
Takes its delight" – thus men say: I guess,
Men by their nature love new-fangledness,
As a bird does that in a cage they feed;
For though night and day they give him heed
Strew his cage as fair and soft as silk,
And give him sugar, honey, bread, and milk,
Yet, on the instant that his door is up,
He with his feet will kick away the cup,
And to the wood he'll fly and worms eat.
So newfangled are they in their meat,
Novelty love, by nature and by kind;
No nobleness of blood has power to bind.
  Such was this tierce, this falcon, woe the day!
Though he was gentle born, and fresh, I say,
And goodly for to see, humble and free,
He saw one day a kite all swiftly flee,
And all at once he loved this kite so
That all his love from me did swiftly go,
And thus he broke his word in that wise.
Now has the kite my love before her eyes,
And I am lost, and there's no remedy!'
And the falcon cried at that with misery,
And swooned away next on Canace's arm.
  Great was the sorrow at the hawk's harm,
That Canace and all her women betrayed.
They knew not how the falcon might be saved;
But Canace bore her homeward in her lap,

And softly in bandages then did her wrap,
Wherever she with her beak had hurt herself.
Now Canace must seek for herbs and delve
Them out of the ground, and make salves new
Of herbs both potent and of finest hue
To heal the hawk; to and fro day and night
She works the business and with all her might.
And by her bed-head she wrought a mew,
To house the hawk, covered with velvet blue,
The colour of constancy in women seen.
And all without the mew was painted green,
In which were pictured all the false fowls,
Such as the titmice are, tierces and owls,
And magpies, to screech at them and chide,
Out of spite were painted alongside.
  So I leave Canace her hawk nursing.
I will say no more now about her ring
Till it should serve my purpose to explain
How the falcon claimed her love again
Repentant, for the story tells us so,
Through the good offices of Cambalo,
The King's son of whom I have you told.
But henceforth I will my tale unfold,
By speaking of adventures and of battles,
Of which were never heard greater marvels.
  First will I tell you of Cambiuskan,
Who in his day many a city won;
And afterwards I'll speak of Algarsife,
And how he won Theodora to wife,
For whom he often in great peril was,
For which he sought help of the horse of brass;
And after will I speak of Cambalo,
Who in the lists, her two brothers' foe,
Fought for Canace, ere he might her win.
And where I left off, I'll again begin.

PART THREE

pollo whirled his chariot up so high,
Into the god's house, Mercury the sly –

The end of the Squire's Tale, which Chaucer left unfinished

The Squire-Franklin Link

Here follow the words of the Franklin to the Squire and the words of the Host to the Franklin

n faith, Squire, well you did yourself acquit
And right nobly too; I applaud your wit,'
Quoth the Franklin, 'considering your youth,
Feelingly you spoke, sire, all praise to you!
In my opinion, not a one that's here
Can match your eloquence, or be your peer,
While you're alive; God give you now good chance,
And of your powers send you continuance,
In your speech I took great pleasure, truly.
I have a son, and by the Trinity,
Rather than have twenty pounds in land,
Though right now it came into my hand,
I'd have him be a man of such discretion
As you are. Fie, then, on mere possession,
If a man be but virtuous withal!
I my son have chided, and shall do more,
For he to virtue's word will ne'er attend,
All he can do is play at dice, and spend,
Lose all that he has, through such ill usage.
And he'd rather talk with some lowly page
Than commune with a true gentle knight,
From whom he might learn gentleness aright.'
'That, for your gentleness!' quoth our Host.
'What, Franklin! Pardee, sire, well you know
That every one of you must tell the rest

A tale or two, or deny my sworn request.'
'That know I well, sire,' quoth the Franklin,
'I pray you, hold me not in your disdain,
Though to the Squire I spoke a word or two.'
'Tell on your tale, let's have no more ado!'
'Gladly, sir Host,' quoth he, 'I will obey
Your every wish; now hark to what I say.
I will be contrary to you in no wise,
As far as my humble wit may suffice.
I pray to God that it may please you, too;
Then will I know that it is good, and true.

THE FRANKLIN'S PROLOGUE

THE PROLOGUE TO THE FRANKLIN'S TALE

he noble Breton lords, in olden days,
From various adventures, fashioned lays,
Rhymed them in the earliest Breton tongue,
Which lays to their instruments were sung,
Or else were read to them for their pleasure;
And one I do recall, in some measure,
Which I'll relate as well as ever I can.
But sirs, since I'm an unlearned man,
At the beginning first I do beseech
That you excuse my unpolished speech.
I never learned rhetoric, that's for certain;
And whatever I speak is bare and plain.
I never slept awhile on Mount Parnassus,
Nor studied Cicero, that's Marcus Tullius.
Adornments I have none, ah, true indeed,
Only such colours as adorn the mead,
Or else such as are used to dye and paint.
Rhetoric's hues to me are dull and quaint
My spirit knows little of them, I fear.
But if you listen, you my tale shall hear.

THE FRANKLIN'S TALE

HERE BEGINS THE FRANKLIN'S TALE

n Armorica, now called Brittany,
There was a knight that loved, and truly he
Strove to serve his lady in best wise.
And many a labour, many an enterprise
He for his lady wrought ere she was won;
For she was among the fairest under the sun,
And also she came of such a high kindred
That the knight scarcely dared, for dread
To tell her of his woe, pain, and distress.
But at the last, seeing his worthiness,
And especially his humble obeisance,
She took such pity on his true penance
That privately they entered in accord,
She to make him her husband and her lord,
With such lordship as men have over wives.
And to live in greater bliss all their lives,
Of his free will he swore to her as knight
That never in all his life, day or night,
Would he take upon himself the mastery
Against her will, nor show her jealousy,
But obey her, and follow her will in all,
As any lover in his lady's thrall;
Save that the name alone of sovereignty
Should he have, lest it shame his dignity.
She thanked him, and with full great humbleness
She said: 'Sire, since, of your gentleness,
You'll allow me to have so great a rein,

May God grant that never between us twain,
Through guilt of mine, be any war or strife.
Sire, I will be your humble loyal wife;
Or may my heart break first, such is my pledge.
Thus were they both in quiet and at rest.
  For one thing, goods sirs, I may safely say,
That lovers must one another fast obey,
If they'd keep company for many a day.
Love will not be constrained by mastery;
When mastery comes, the God of Love anon
Beats his wings, and farewell, he is gone!
Love is a thing as any spirit free.
Women, by nature, wish for liberty,
And not to be constrained, as in thrall,
And so do men, and truth is this for all.
Look who is most patient in their love,
Has the advantage and so towers above.
Patience is a high virtue, that's certain,
For it achieves, as clerics do maintain,
Things that force is unable to attain.
At every word we must not chide, complain;
Learn to accept, or else, for here below,
You shall learn, whether you will or no.
And in this world, indeed, no one exists
Who does not sometimes speak a word amiss.
Ire, sickness, or the stars' configuration,
Wine, woe, or our humours' alteration
Often gives cause to do amiss or speak.
Revenge for every wrong may no man wreak;
According to the time, act with temperance
All you that understand good governance.
And therefore had this wise and noble knight,
Sworn patience, so as to live at ease, aright,
And she to him as earnestly did swear
That he should never find a fault in her.
  Here may men see a humble, wise accord!
Thus she makes him her servant and her lord –

Servant in love, and yet her lord in marriage;
Thus was he both in lordship and in bondage.
Bondage? – Nay, in lordship high above,
Since he had both his lady and his love;
His lady, certain, and his wife also,
Which the law of love accords with, though.
  And now he had met with such prosperity,
Home with his wife he went to his country,
Not far from Penmarch Point, his dwelling was,
Where he lived in bliss and in solace.
  Who can know, unless he wedded be,
The joy, the ease, and the prosperity
That is between a husband and a wife?
A year and more lasted this blissful life,
Till the knight whose story I discuss,
Of Caer-rhud, and called Arveragus,
Determined to go and live a year or twain,
In England, that was also called Britain,
To seek in arms both worship and honour,
For all his pleasure won he from such labour,
And dwelt there two years; the book says thus.
  Now I'll cease to speak of Arveragus,
And I will speak of Dorigen his wife,
That loved her husband as her heart's life.
At his absence she wept sore and sighed,
As does when she will the noblest bride.
She mourned, waked, wailed, fasted, cried;
While longing for his presence thus denied,
So that all this wide world she set at naught.
Her friends, who knew the burden of her thought,
Comforted her, when they could, in every way.
They preached at her, telling her night and day,
That she was killing herself, in vain, alas!
And every comfort possible that was
Useful they gave, made it all their business,
To try and put and end to her heaviness.
  By a slow process, known to everyone,

Men may carve away so long in stone
That some figure may thus imprinted be.
So long had they comforted her that she
Received, through hope and through reason,
The imprint of their endless consolation,
And they began her sorrow to assuage;
She must not always let her feelings rage.
  And Arveragus, amongst all this care,
Had sent letters, speaking of his welfare,
And how he would return swiftly again;
Else this sorrow would her heart have slain.
  Her friends saw her sorrow start to abate,
And begged her on their knees, for God's sake,
To come and roam about in company,
To drive away her gloomy fantasy.
And finally she granted their request,
Because she saw that it was for the best.
  Now, her castle stood close by the sea,
And often with her friends wandered she,
To take her pleasure, on a bank full high,
Where she saw many a ship and barge go by,
Sailing their course, wherever they chanced to go.
But that too was a portion of her woe,
For to herself, full oft, 'Alas!' said she,
'Is there no ship, of all these that I see,
Will bring me my lord again? Then my heart
Would be cured of bitter sorrow's smart.'
  At other times she would sit and think,
And cast her eyes downward from the brink.
Yet when she saw the ghastly rocks all black,
For fear indeed her heart would almost crack,
On her feet she could scarce herself maintain.
Then would she sit upon the grass again,
And piteously the flowing tide behold,
And speak as thus, with sorrowful sighs cold:
  'Eternal God that through your providence
Lead the world in certain governance,

You made nothing in vain and yet, alack,
Lord, these fiendish, grisly rocks all black,
That seem to me rather a foul confusion
In their work, than any fair creation
Of such a wise and perfect God, thus able,
Why have you wrought this work unreasonable?
For by this work, south, north, west or east
There is nurtured neither man nor beast.
It does no good, to my mind, but annoys.
See you not, Lord, how mankind it destroys?
A hundred thousand souls, among mankind
These rocks have slain, no more brought to mind;
Yet mankind's so fair a portion of your work
You made it in your image, says the clerk.
Thus it seems you had both love and charity
Towards mankind; so how then may it be
That you created such means to destroy?
– Which do no good, but evermore annoy.
I know, indeed, that clerics will attest,
To arguments, that show all's for the best,
Though what the reasons are I do not know.
But may the God that made the winds to blow
Keep safe my lord! – That is my conclusion.
To clerks I leave all the disputation.
But would to God that all these rocks so black
Were sunken into Hell, and came not back,
For his sake, they slay my heart with fear!'
– Thus she did say, with many a piteous tear.
Her friends could see she derived no sport
Roaming by the sea, but pure discomfort,
And chose to take their pleasure somewhere else.
They led her among rivers, and by wells,
And through other places all delightful;
Danced, played chess, backgammon, to be helpful.
So one day, right in the morning-tide,
Unto a garden that was there beside,
Into which had been taken as they planned

Victuals and other things at their command,
They went to sport and play the livelong day.
And this was on the sixth morn in May,
When May had painted with his softest showers
The garden, filled with leaves and with flowers;
And man's handicraft so skilfully
Arrayed had all this garden, truthfully,
That never was there a garden so prized,
Unless it were the ancient Paradise.
The odour of flowers and the fresh sight
Would have rendered any heart light
That ever was born, unless some great sickness
Or great sorrow consumed it with distress,
So full it was of beauty and elegance.
And after dinner they began to dance
And sing as well, save Dorigen alone,
Who ever made plaint, and ever made moan,
For in the dance she saw not him below,
Who was her husband and her love also.
But nonetheless she must a while abide,
Be of good hope, and let her sorrow slide.
  Now in this dance, among the other men,
There pranced a squire before Dorigen,
Who fresher was and jollier in array,
As I do live, than is the month of May.
He sang and danced better than any man,
That is, or was, since ever the world began.
And then he was, if I should him describe,
One of the handsomest of men alive;
Young, strong, right virtuous, and rich and wise,
And well beloved, considered a great prize.
And briefly, truth to tell, as I recall,
Unbeknown to Dorigen at all,
This gallant squire, a servant true of Venus,
Who by name was called Aurelius,
Had loved her the best of any creature,
As was his fate, for two years and more,

But never dared proclaim his suffering;
He drank his sorrow straight from the spring.
He had despaired; nothing he dared say,
Save in his songs something he'd convey
Of all his woe, while generally lamenting.
He said he loved, but was beloved by nothing.
Of such matter he made many lays,
Songs, plaints, rondeaux and virelais,
How that he dare not of his sorrow tell,
But languished as a Fury does in Hell;
And die he must, he said, as did Echo,
For Narcissus, who dared not tell her woe.
In no other manner than this, as I say,
Dare he to her his woe at all betray;
Save that, perhaps, sometimes at a dance,
Where the young folk will keep observance,
It may well be he looked upon her face
In such a manner as man asks for grace,
Though she knew nothing of his intent.
Nonetheless, it chanced, ere they went thence,
Because he happened to be her neighbour,
And was a man of good repute and honour,
And she had known him some time before,
They fell to talking, and more and more
Towards his purpose drew Aurelius.
And when he saw his chance, he spoke up thus:
'Madame,' quoth he, 'by God who this world made,
If I had known your heart felt no dismay,
I wish that day when your Arveragus
Crossed the sea, that I, Aurelius,
Had gone too, never to return again.
For I see now my service is but vain;
My reward is but the breaking of my heart.
Madame, have pity on my bitter smart,
For with a word you may me slay or save.
Here at your feet, would God, they dug my grave!

Dorigen and Aurelius

I have no time to say what I would say;
Have mercy, sweet, or death is mine today.'
  She began to stare at Aurelius.
'Is that your thought,' quoth she, 'and say you thus?
Never have I suspected what you meant.
But now, Aurelius, knowing your intent,
By that God who gave me soul and life,
Know, I shall never play the faithless wife
In word or deed, as far as I have wit;
I will be his to whom I have been knit.
Take that for a final answer now from me.'
But after it teasingly thus said she:
  'Aurelius, by the high God above,
As I wish I might have been your love,
Since I hear you so piteously complain.
Lo, that day when from Brittany's main,
You remove every reef, stone by stone,
So no ship is hampered through that zone –
I say, when the coast is rendered so clean
Of rocks, that never a stone can be seen –
Then I will love you more than any man.
Hear my truth said, as plainly as I can.'
  'Is there no better grace in you?' quoth he.
'No, by the Lord,' quoth she, 'who fashioned me,
For I know full well it shall never betide.
Let such folly out of your heart slide!
What pleasure is added thus to a man's life
In making love to another man's wife,
Who can have her body when he will?
  Aurelius was ever in deeps sighs still;
Woe was Aurelieus, when this he heard,
And with sorrowful heart he answered her:
'Madame, to lose you is impossible!
So let death come, sudden and horrible.'
– And with that he turned away anon.
Her other friends appeared, many a one,
And in the alleyways roamed up and down,

Knowing nothing of this sad conclusion.
And suddenly the revels began anew,
Till the bright sun had lost his yellow hue,
Since the horizon robbed them of his light –
Which is as much as to say, that it was night.
And home they went, in joy and in solace,
Save only poor Aurelius, alas!
He to his house has gone, with sorrowful heart.
That he and death shall not be long apart,
He feels, and senses his heart grow cold.
Up to the heavens he his hands does hold,
On his bare knees then he sets him down,
And in a rage of feeling says his orison.
For woe his wits were addled in his head;
He knew not what he spoke, but thus he said.
With piteous heart his plaint was thus begun
Unto the gods, and first unto the sun.
'Apollo,' said he, 'God and governor
Of every plant, and herb, tree and flower,
Who gives, according to your declination,
To each of them its time and season,
As your position changes, low or high,
Lord Phoebus, cast now your merciful eye
On sad Aurelius, wretched and forlorn!
Lo, Lord, my lady now my death has sworn
Though I am guiltless, your benignity
Upon my doomed heart may yet take pity.
For I know, Lord Phoebus, if you wished,
You, save for my lady, could help me best.
Now vouchsafe me that I might advise
You how I may be helped, and in what wise.
Luna, your sister blest, who bright does sheen,
And of the sea is chief goddess and queen,
(Though Neptune has the mastery of the sea,
Yet empress high above him still is she),
You know, Lord, that just as her desire
Is to be quickened, lighted from your fire,

And thus she follows you diligently,
So does the sea desire, naturally,
To follow her, since she is the goddess
Of both the sea and rivers, great and less.
Wherefore, Lord Phoebus, this is my request –
Perform this miracle, or my heart may burst –
That even now at your next opposition,
When you are in the sign of the Lion,
Beg that she so great a flood will bring
That five fathom at the least it may spring
Higher than the highest rock in Brittany,
And for two years let this great flood be.
Then, surely, to my lady I may say,
"Hold to your pledge; the rocks are all away."
'Lord Phoebus, do this miracle for me:
Ask her to run her course no more swiftly
Than you, I say, request that your sister go
No faster than you, these two years though.
Then she will be at full the entire way,
And the spring flood last both night and day.
And if she'll not vouchsafe in that manner,
To grant to me my sovereign lady dear,
Beg her to sink each rock deeper down
Into her own dark region underground
The shadowy kingdom Pluto dwells in,
Or nevermore shall I my lady win.
Your temple at Delphi I'll barefoot seek,
Lord Phoebus, see the tears run down my cheek,
And on my pain have some compassion!'
And with that he swooned after a fashion,
And lay on the ground a long time in a trance.
His brother, who knew of this mischance,
Caught him up, and to bed had him brought.
Despairing, filled with his tormented thought,
I'll leave this sorrowing creature there to lie;
Let him choose whether he'll live or die!
Arvegarus, in health, with great honour,

Like one who was of chivalry the flower,
Is home again, with other noblemen.
O joyous are you now, sweet Dorigen,
Who have your gallant husband in your arms,
The fresh knight, the worthy man at arms,
Who loves you as he loves his own heart's life!
Nothing made him suspect that to his wife
Any man had spoken, while he voyaged about,
Of love indeed, nor was he plagued with doubt.
He gave not a thought to any such matter,
But danced, jousted, and made much of her.
And so in joy and bliss I'll let him dwell,
And of the ill Aurelius I will tell.
  Languishing, and in torment furious,
Two years and more lay sad Aurelius,
Before the ground he dare set foot upon.
Of comfort all this time he had none,
Save from his brother, who was a clerk.
He knew of all this woe and all this work;
For to no other creature, it is certain,
Dare he a single word of this explain,
In his breast bore it discretely rather,
More so than Pamphilus for Galatea.
His breast was whole, as outwardly was seen,
But in his heart was ever the arrow keen;
And a wound unhealed, with surface scar,
In surgery is perilous of cure
Unless they touch the arrow, or come thereby.
  His brother wept, away from public eye,
Till finally he fell into remembrance
That while he was at Orleans in France –
As students who are young and zealous
To read in arts abstruse and curious
Seek every nook and cranny, in turn,
The recondite sciences for to learn –
He recalled that once, upon a day,
In the college, at Orleans, as I say,

A book of natural magic, he saw
Because his friend a bachelor of law,
Though he was there for other study,
Left it lying, on his desk, discretely.
Which book spoke fully of the operations
Touching the eight and twenty mansions
Belonging to the moon, and suchlike folly,
Considered, in our day, not worth a flea;
For Holy Church's faith, to our belief
Allows no like illusion to bring grief.
And when this book entered his remembrance,
Swiftly his heart for joy began to dance,
And to himself he said thus, privately:
'My brother will be cured right swiftly;
For I am certain there are true sciences
By which men conjure up appearances,
Such as the subtlest conjurors display.
For often at feasts, have I heard men say,
Conjurors within a hall, full large,
Have filled a space with water and a barge,
And in the hall have rowed up and down.
Sometimes a grim lion have they shown,
And sometimes flowers sprang up instead,
Sometimes a vine with grapes white and red,
Sometimes a castle, all of lime and stone,
And when they chose, they banished it, anon;
Or so it seemed, to everyone in sight.
'Now then, I deduce, that if I might
At Orleans some old learned fellow find
Who has the lunar mansions in his mind
Or other natural magic, as above,
He could ensure my brother had his love.
For by illusions a learned man, in fact,
Could make men think that all the rocks black
Of Brittany had vanished every one,
And ships along the shore might go and come,
And then maintain the sight a week or so,

So may my brother be cured of his woe;
Then she must keep to all her promises,
Or bring shame on herself, I'd suggest.'
Why must I make a longer tale of this?
To his brother's bed he came, and all his
Comfort brought, urging him to be gone
To Orleans, that he started up anon,
And forward on the road did he fare,
Hoping to be eased of all his care.
When they had almost come to that city,
Only two furlongs short, or maybe three,
A young clerk, roaming by himself, they met,
Who greeted them in Latin, at the outset,
With great politeness, and this wondrous thing:
'I know,' quoth he,' the reason for your coming
And before a foot more they onward went,
He told them all about their true intent.
Our Breton scholar asks him then to say
What has become of scholars of past days,
Whom he once knew: dead as it appears,
At which he weeps a plethora of tears.
Down from his horse Aurelius got, anon,
And with the magician forth was gone
Home to his house: he set them at their ease.
They lacked no refreshment that could please;
So well provisioned a house as was this one
Aurelius in all his life had seen none.
Conjured for him, ere they went to supper,
Were forests, parks, filled with wild deer;
Where he saw stags with antlers high,
The largest ever seen by human eye.
He saw a hundred of them slain by hounds,
Some, shot by arrows, bled from bitter wounds.
And when they had all vanished, these wild deer,
Came falconers beside a river fair,
Who with their hawks had many heron slain.
Then he saw knights jousting on a plain;

And after this in conjured elegance,
He saw his lady there as she did dance,
And he himself was dancing, as he thought.
And when the master who this magic wrought
Saw it was time, he clapped his hands, and lo,
Farewell all our revel, it vanished so!
And yet they had not moved from the house,
While viewing all this sight so marvellous,
But in his study, with his books, the three
Of them sat still, and no one else to see.
  His squire then was summoned by the master,
Who said to him: 'Is all prepared for supper?
Almost an hour it is, and no mistake,
Since I bade you our supper swiftly make,
While these worthy men I took with me
Into the study, to view my library.'
'Sire' quoth the squire, 'I'll make a vow
That it is ready, you may eat right now.'
'Let us go sup, then, 'quoth he, 'that is best.
Amorous people too must sometimes rest!'
  After the supper they bargained freely
As to what sum the master's prize should be
For removing all the rocks from Brittany,
From Gironde too, to the Seine's estuary.
  He showed reluctance, swore, for God's sake,
Less than a thousand pounds he would not take,
Certainly, for that sum he would have none.
  Aurelius with blissful heart anon
Answered thus: 'Fie on your thousand pound!
This wide world of ours, men say is round,
I would give that, if I were lord of it!
The bargain's made, take what you think fit;
You shall be paid, truly, on my oath.
But look you now, no negligence or sloth
Must keep us here longer than tomorrow.'
'Nay,' quoth the scholar, 'on my faith, I vow.'
  Aurelius went to bed, as he thought best,

And well nigh all that night he took his rest.
Tired with his labour, yet with hopes of bliss,
Ease to his woeful heart came not amiss.
  On the morrow, as soon as it was day,
To Brittany they rode the nearest way,
Aurelius, with the scholar at his side,
And descended, where they would abide.
It was, then, say the books, as I remember,
The cold and frosty season, in December.
  Phoebus waxed old, and in this station
Dull brass was he, who in high declination
Shines like burnished gold with rays so bright;
But now in Capricorn he shed his light,
Where full pale he shone, I dare maintain.
The bitter frosts, with winter's sleet and rain,
All the garden greenery had interred.
Janus sat by the fire with double beard,
And from his bugle-horn he supped his wine,
Before him brawn of the sharp-tusked swine,
And 'Sing, Noel!' cried every lusty man.
  Aurelius, doing all that ever a man can
Gave the master good cheer and reverence,
And prayed him to employ his diligence
To release him from his pain's fierce smart,
Or plunge a sword into his very heart.
  The subtle clerk took pity on the man
And night and day as swiftly as one can
Sought out a time to achieve conclusion,
That is to say create the right illusion
By deft appearance, conjuror's mystery –
I lack the terms for such astrology –
That she and everyone would think and say
That from Brittany the rocks were all away,
Or else had been sunken underground.
So, at last, the proper date was found
To try his tricks and work the wretchedness
Of all such superstitious cursedness.

His Toledan tables forth he brought,
Rightly corrected, so he lacked for naught,
Neither for blocks nor individual years,
Nor to fix the root, lacked nothing here
For his equations of centre, argument,
And the proportionals convenient
For the calculation of everything:
So, from the stars' eighth sphere, in his working,
How far the moon's first mansion had moved
From the first point of Aries above,
That in the ninth sphere considered is;
Full subtly he calculated this.
  When he had located the first mansion,
He knew all the rest by due proportion,
And in which sign the moon rose he knew well
And in which face and term, and so could tell
Which was now the moon's precise mansion,
As a result of all this operation:
And he knew the right observances,
To create such illusions and mischances
As heathen folk employed in olden days.
After which there were no more delays,
And through his magic, for two weeks I'd say,
It seemed that all the rocks were cleared away.
  Aurelius, still in despair through all of this,
As to whether he'd have his love or fare amiss,
Waited night and day to see this miracle.
And when he knew there was no obstacle –
And that the rocks had vanished every one –
Down at the master's feet he fell anon,
And said: 'I, woeful wretch, Aurelius,
Thank you, lord, and my lady Venus,
Who have freed me from my cares cold!'
And to the temple then away did go,
To where he knew he should his lady see.
And when he saw his opportunity,
With fearful heart, full humbly did appear,

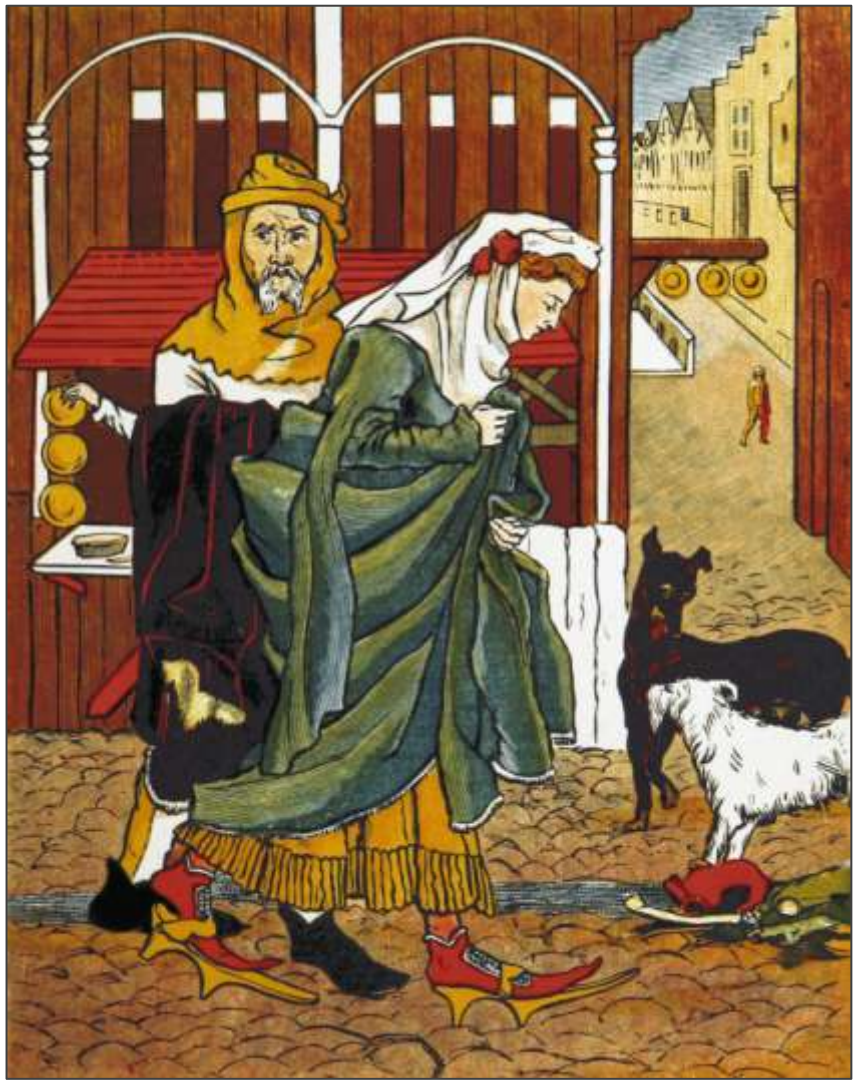
And greeted then his sovereign lady dear.
'My true lady,' quoth this woeful man,
'Whom I most dread and love, deep as I can,
Whom I would in this world least displease,
Had I not suffered for you such miseries
That I must die here at your feet anon,
I'd not have shown that I was woebegone.
But surely I must die, or still complain;
You slay me, guiltless, merely from the pain.
But though to sorrow for my death you're loath,
Think a while before you break your oath.
Repent you so, and think of God above,
Before you punish me who seek your love.
For, Madame, now recall the pledge I cite –
Though I may claim nothing of you by right
My sovereign lady, but only ask your grace –
Yet in the garden, yonder, in that place,
You well know what you have sworn to me,
And there your troth you plighted loyally
To love me best – God's witness, you said so,
Albeit that I am unworthy though.
Madame, your honour I speak for, I vow,
More than to save my heart's life right now:
I have done all that you commanded me,
And if you deign to, you may go and see.
Do as you will; yet have your oath in mind,
For quick or dead, there you shall me find.
With you it lies, to save my life or slay;
But true it is the rocks are now away.'
He took his leave, and she astonished stood.
In her whole face was not a drop of blood.
She had thought never to fall into this trap.
'Alas!' quoth she, 'to suffer this mishap!
I thought it an impossibility
That such a monstrous miracle could be!
It defies the processes of nature.'
And home she went, a sorrowful creature;

For fear, indeed, she could scarcely move.
She wept, she wailed there, for a day or two,
And swooned so, that it was sad to see.
But why she did so, not a soul told she,
For far from town was her Arveragus.
Yet to herself she spoke, lamenting thus,
With pallid face, and sorrowful did appear
In her lament, as you may truly hear.
'Alas, Fortune, of you I will complain,
Who suddenly have snared me in your chain,
To escape from which I find no succour,
Save only death, or else yet dishonour;
One of these two I must clearly choose.
Yet, nonetheless, I had much rather lose
My life, than see my body suffer shame,
Or know myself as false, and lose my name.
And by my death I may be quit of this.
Has not many a noble wife, and foolish
Maiden, slain herself before now, alas,
Rather than bring her body to that pass?
Yes, for certain; lo, these tales bear witness.
When thirty tyrants full of wickedness
Had Phidon slain, in Athens at a feast,
They ordered his daughters to be seized
And brought before them, humbled in their sight,
All naked, to assuage their foul delight,
And in their father's blood they made them dance
Upon the pavement – God send them mischance!
For which these woeful maidens, full of dread,
Rather than they should lose their maidenheads,
Broke away, and leapt into a well,
And drowned themselves, as the old books tell.
The Messenians requested that men seek
In Lacadaemon, fifty maidens meek,
On whom they might work their lechery.
But there was none of all that company
That did not slay herself, with good intent,

Choosing to die rather than to assent
And be robbed there of their maidenhead.
Why then of death should I remain in dread?
Lo, then, the tyrant, Aristoclides,
Who loved a maiden called Stimphalides,
Who when her father slain was in the night,
Unto Diana's temple fled outright,
And grasped hold of her statue too,
From which statue she could not be loosed.
No one there could tear her hands away,
Till in that selfsame place, they did her slay.
  Since these maidens died before they might
Be defiled by man's foul appetite,
A wife should rather kill herself than be
Defiled by any man, it seems to me.
What shall I say of Hasdrubal's fair wife
Who at Carthage deprived herself of life?
For when she knew the Romans had the town,
She took her children all, and so leapt down
Into the fire, and chose to perish there
Rather than any Roman ravage her.
Did not Lucrece slay herself, alas,
At Rome when she oppressed was
By Tarquin, because she thought it shame
To be alive when she had lost her name?
Of Miletus, the seven maids also
Slew themselves indeed, for dread and woe,
Rather than let the Gauls them oppress.
More than a thousand stories, I should guess,
Might I now tell about the matter here.
When Abradatas fell, his wife so dear
Slew herself, and let her life-blood glide
Into Abradatas' wounds both deep and wide,
And said: "My body, at the least, I say,
No man shall defile, for I go my way."
  What need of more examples, to explain
How so many women themselves have slain

Rather than be defiled, in misery?
I conclude that better it is for me
To slay myself than be defiled thus.
I will be true to my Arveragus,
Or I will slay myself in some way here,
As did Demotion's daughter dear,
Because she would not defiled be.
O Scedasus, the heart fills with pity
Reading how your daughter died, alas,
Who slew herself in a similar pass.
As great a pity was felt, or even more,
For the Theban maid who foiled Nicanor
And slew herself, a case of equal woe.
Another Theban maiden died also,
Because a Macedonian her oppressed;
Her death repaid her loss of maidenhead.
What shall I say of Niceratus' wife,
Who in like case bereft herself of life?
How true also to Alcibiades,
His lover was, who chose to die, as these,
Rather than let his body unburied be?
Lo what a wife Alcestis was!' quoth she.
'What says Homer of good Penelope?
All Greece knew her wifely chastity.
Of Laodamia is it written thus,
That when at Troy died Protesilaus,
She would no longer live beyond his day.
The same of noble Portia, I may say:
Without Brutus, she too could not live,
For his was all the heart she had to give.
The perfect wife was Artemisia,
Honoured in Barbary by every peer.
O, Teuta, queen, your wifely chastity
To every wife may as a mirror be!
The same thing I may say of Bilia,
Of Rhodogue, and of Valeria.'
So Dorigen, a day or two, did sigh,

Ever purposing that she would die.
But nonetheless, on the third night,
Home came Avergarus, the noble knight,
And asked her why she wept so sore;
At which she began to weep even more.
'Alas,' quoth she, 'that ever I was born!
Thus have I said,' quoth she, 'thus have I sworn' –
And told him all that you have heard before;
No need to repeat it here for you once more.
Her husband, with kind face, in friendly wise,
Answered, and said as I shall now advise:
'Is there aught else, Dorigen, but this?'
'Nay, nay,' quoth she, 'God help me, as it is,
It is too much, were it God's own will!'
'Yet, wife,' quoth he, 'let sleep on what is still.
All may be well, perchance, even today.
You must keep your promise, by my faith!
For, and may God have mercy upon me,
I would rather be slain, mercilessly,
For the very love I have for you, I say,
Than that your word you not keep always.
His word is the noblest thing a man may keep.'
– Yet with these words he began to weep,
And said, 'I forbid you, on pain of death,
Ever, while left to you are life and breath,
To tell a single soul of this adventure.
As I best may, this woe I will endure;
And show you no countenance of heaviness,
Lest folk may think harm of you, or guess.'
He summoned forth a squire and a maid;
'Go forth anon, with Dorigen' he said,
'And bring her to the place she tells, anon.'
They took their leave and on their way were gone,
But they knew not why she thither went;
He told no one at all of his intent.
Perchance a heap of you, a crowd that is,
Consider him a foolish man in this,
Seeking to place his wife in jeopardy.



Lady Crossing the Street

Hear the tale, then you may judge her truly;
She may have better fortune than it seems;
Judge when you know whether the tale redeems.
  That squire, you will remember, Aurelius,
He, who to Dorigen had proved so amorous,
Happened by chance our Dorigen to meet,
In the town, and right in the busiest street,
As she was about to take the road, outright,
To the garden where her troth she did plight.
And he was walking garden-ward also,
For he spied on her wherever she may go
From her house to any manner of place.
So thus they met, by chance or yet by grace,
And he saluted her with glad intent,
And asked her then whitherward she went.
And she answered, as though she were half-mad,
'Unto the garden as my husband bade,
To keep my word to you, alas, alas!'
  Aurelius, stunned at what had come to pass,
Felt, in his heart, a true compassion
For her, and the cause of her lamentation,
And for Arveragus, the worthy knight,
Who bade her keep her word, come what might,
So loath was he to let her stray from the truth.
And in his heart such pity filled the youth,
He thought, considering it from every side,
That he should rather let intention slide,
Than commit such churlish wretchedness
Against generosity and gentleness.
So, briefly, in a few words, he said thus:
  'Madame, say to your lord Arveragus,
That since I perceived his great nobleness,
His treatment of you, in your great distress,
That he would rather be ashamed – sad truth –
Than let you break your word to me, forsooth,
Then I would rather suffer lasting woe
Than ever harm the love between you so.

I release, you, Madame, from your bond,
Quit of every promise, out of hand,
That you have made to me heretofore,
As free as on the day when you were born.
My troth I plight, that I shall never grieve
You for promise given; and take my leave
Of you, the best and the truest wife
That ever I have known in all my life.
Now wives beware of oaths and, for the rest,
Remember Dorigen, let me suggest!
Thus may a squire do a gentle deed
As well as any knight, as you can see.'
  She thanked him then, on her knees all bare,
And home to her husband she did fare,
And told him everything you've heard said.
You may be sure, he more joy displayed
Than it were possible for me to write.
What more of this story should I cite?
Arveragus and Dorigen his wife
In sovereign bliss lived out their life.
With never any anger there between;
He cherished her as if she were a queen,
And she was true to him for evermore.
Of these two folk, now, you'll hear no more.
  Aurelius, who all the cost had borne,
Cursed the day that ever he was born.
'Alas,' quoth he, 'the promise that I made
Of purest gold a thousand pound in weight
To this philosopher! What shall I do?
I see I must be ruined by loving, too!
My inheritance I needs must sell,
And be a beggar – here I may not dwell,
To shame all my kindred in this place –
And yet he may reveal a better grace.
For nonetheless, perhaps, I might assay
On certain days, year by year, to pay,
And thank him then for his great courtesy.

My word I will keep; no lies for me.'
  With sore heart he went to his coffer,
And took his gold to the philosopher,
In value, some five hundred pounds I guess,
And beseeched him, of his gentleness,
To grant him time to pay the remainder;
And said: 'Master, this boast I make here,
I've never failed of my word as yet.
Be sure, I will be quit of all the debt
Towards you, however I may fare,
Though it mean I must beg, and go bare.
If you would vouchsafe, on security,
To give me respite for two years or three,
All would be well, for else I must sell
My heritage; there is no more to tell.'
  The philosopher soberly him answered,
And said thus, when he the words had heard:
'Did I not keep covenant with thee?'
'Yes, and well and truly, too,' quoth he.
'Did you not win your lady, tell no lie?'
'No, no,' quoth he, and sorrowfully did sigh.
'What was the reason? Tell me if you can.'
  Aurelius his tale anon began,
And told him all that you have heard before;
No need for me to tell it you once more.
He said: 'Arveragus, in his nobleness,
Would rather die in sorrow and distress,
Than let his wife to her word be false.'
Dorigen's sorrow also he told him of,
How loath she was to prove a wicked wife,
Would rather that day have lost her life,
And that she gave her word in all innocence;
She'd never heard of magical disappearance.
'It made me feel for her such deep pity,
That as freely as he sent her to me,
As freely I sent her to him again.
That's the long and short; the sense is plain.'

The philosopher replied: 'My dear brother,
Each of you dealt nobly with the other.
You are a squire, and he is a knight;
But God forbid, in His blissful might,
That a clerk may not do a noble deed
As well as either of you may, indeed!
Sire, I release you from your thousand pounds,
As if you had but now crept out of the ground,
And never, before now, had known of me.
For sire, I will not take a penny from thee
For all my skill, no, naught for my travail.
You have paid well for my bread and ale;
That is enough, and so farewell, good day!'
And then to horse, and forth he took his way.
Lordings, this question will I ask you now:
Who was the most generous, sayest thou?
Now tell me that, ere you farther wend!
I can no more; my tale is at an end.

Here is ended the Franklin's Tale

THE PHYSICIAN'S TALE

HERE FOLLOWS THE PHYSICIAN'S TALE

here was, or so says Titus Livius,
A knight, who was named Virginius,
Filled with all honour and nobility,
Rich in friends he was, and as wealthy.
This knight had a daughter by his wife;
He'd had no other child throughout his life.
Fair was this maid, of outstanding beauty
Beyond all others whom a man might see;
For Nature had with sovereign diligence
Created her of such great excellence
As if to say: 'Behold how, I, Nature,
Thus can form and tint a living creature
When I so choose! Who can this counterfeit?
Not Pygmalion, though he forge and beat,
And carve and paint, nor, I would maintain,
Apelles, Zeuxis who would work in vain
If they should carve, and paint, and forge, and beat,
Presuming to create a counterfeit.
For the Maker, and the Principal,
Appointed me his Vicar-General
To form and fashion earthly creatures
As I wish: all things are in my power
Under the moon that doth wane and wax,
And for my work no payment do I ask;
My Lord and I are both of one accord.
I made her to the honour of my Lord;
So I do with all my other creatures,

Whatever hue they have, or features.'
– Thus it seems to me Nature should say.
  Fourteen years of age was then this maid,
In whom Nature took such great delight;
For just as she can paint the lily white,
And red the rose, just then such a picture
Had she painted in this noble creature,
Ere she was born, tinting her limbs free,
Wherever the colour should rightly be.
And Phoebus dyed her tresses all complete,
Like to the streams of his burnished heat.
And if she was excellent in beauty,
A thousand times more virtuous was she.
Within her there was lacking no condition
To draw praise from people of discretion.
As much in soul as body chaste was she,
So that she flowered in her virginity
With true humility and abstinence,
With true temperance and with patience,
Restrained in her behaviour and array.
Discreet she was in answering, always,
Though she was wise as Pallas, I dare say;
Her eloquence womanly, without display;
No affected language ever did she
Employ to seem wise, but in her degree
She spoke, and all her words, great and less,
Conducive were to virtue and gentleness.
Modest she was, in her maiden chasteness,
Constant in heart, and in action tireless
Not wishing to be thought idle, lazy.
Bacchus had of her mouth no mastery;
For wine and youth do Venus' works increase,
Like a fire on which men cast oil or grease.
And of her own virtue, unconstrained,
She had many times an illness feigned,
So that she might flee the company
When there was likelihood of foolery,

As at a feast, a revel, or a dance
Which are occasions oft for dalliance.
Such things indeed may make our daughters be
Ripe and bold too soon, as men may see,
Dangerously so, as has been known before;
For all too soon they practice more and more
Their boldness, when they seek to play the wife.
  And you fair mistresses, in later life,
Who have lords' daughters in your governance –
Be not offended by my words, perchance –
Consider, you've been set to governing
Lords' daughters for one of two things:
Either because you kept your chastity,
Or else because you fell, from frailty,
And know it well enough, the ancient dance,
And have forsaken fully such mischance
For evermore; therefore, for Christ's sake,
Teach them virtue now, and make no mistake.
  A poacher of venison who is long past
His guilty acts, and leaves off his old craft
Makes the best gamekeeper of any man.
So guard them well, for if you wish you can.
Be careful that to no vice you assent,
Lest you be dammed for your foul intent;
For one who shall, a traitor is, for certain.
And take good note of all that I shall say:
Of all treasons, the crowning pestilence
Is when an act betrays pure innocence.
  You fathers, and you mothers too, also,
Whether you have one child or more, know
You're responsible for their surveillance
While they remain within your governance.
Beware then, lest, by your mode of living,
Or by your negligence in chastising,
They perish by your example; I dare say
If they do so, then shall you dearly pay.
Under a shepherd slack and negligent

The wolf will many a sheep and lamb have rent.
Let that one example suffice me here,
For I must turn again to my true matter.
  This maid, the tale of whom I now express,
Governing herself, needed no mistresses.
In her mode of life, maidens might read,
As in a book, every good word or deed
That belongs to such a maiden virtuous,
So prudent she, so meritorious,
Such that her fame was known on every side,
That of her beauty and her goodness, wide
Throughout the land, praised by everyone
Who loved virtue, save the envious alone,
For Envy is grieved by other men's wealth,
And glad of their sorrow, and of their ill-health –
Augustine is the source of that description.
  This maid upon a day went into town
Towards a temple, with her mother dear,
As is the manner of young maidens here.
Now, there was then a justice in that town
Governor of the region all around;
And it befell, that the judge his eyes cast
Upon this maid, his gaze there held fast,
As she passed the place in which he stood.
Anon his heart changed and his mood.
So caught was he by the beauty of this maid.
And to himself all secretly he said:
'This maid shall be mine, before any man!'
  Anon the devil into his heart now ran,
And taught him swiftly that by some sleight
Of hand, he the maid to his purpose might
Win, for through force or bribery indeed
He saw no way in which he might succeed,
For she was rich in friends, and also she
Was so confirmed in her virtuous duty,
That he knew well he might never win
Her mind or body to indulge in sin.

So after deliberating, casting round,
He sent for a rogue living in the town,
Whom he knew was subtle and was bold.
The justice to this rogue his tale told,
In secrecy, and told him to be sure
Never to tell it to another creature,
For if he did, he would lose his head.
When the cursed reed had thus assented,
The judge was glad, and gave him good cheer,
And gifts as well, gifts both precious and dear.
When shaped was all their conspiracy
In every detail, how his lechery
Was to be satisfied full subtly –
As you shall hear soon, and openly –
Home went the rogue, his name was Claudius.
The false judge, whose name was Appius –
Such was his name, for this is no fable,
But is known to history, and notable;
The substance of it, true, without a doubt –
This false judge now went fast about
To hurry on his crime as best he may.
And it befell, soon after, on a day,
The false justice, for so says the story,
As was his right, playing judge and jury,
Was giving his judgement in another case.
The false rogue rushed in on him apace,
And said: 'Lord, if it might be your will,
Grant me my rights regarding this true bill,
A bill of complaint against Virginius.
And if he denies that things are thus,
I will prove them so, and find good witness
The truth is as my bill doth here express'
The judge replied: 'In the defendant's absence
I cannot bring this new case to sentence.
Summon him, then you I'll gladly hear;
You shall have justice, not injustice here.'
Virginius came, to learn the judge's will,

And right anon was read the cursed bill.
The content of it was as you shall hear:
'To you, my lord Sir Appius so dear,
Declares your humble servant Claudius
That a knight, named here, Virginius,
Against the law, against all equity,
Holds, and against my will, most expressly,
My servant, one who is my thrall by right,
One that was stolen from my house by night
When she was very young; this will I prove
By witnesses, my lord, if you approve.
She's not his child, whatever he may say.
Wherefore to you, my lord the judge, I say,
Yield me my thrall now, if it be your will!'
Lo, this was all the content of his bill.
  Virginius stared in horror at the rogue;
But swiftly, before his tale could be told,
And he reveal the truth, as a knight,
Call witnesses to demonstrate his right,
And show the falseness of his adversary,
The cursed judge who would no longer tarry,
Nor hear a word more from Virginius,
Issued his judgement and declared it thus:
'This man shall have his servant, I rule so.
You shall no longer keep her, you must go
And bring her forth, and make her now our ward.
The man shall have his thrall, so I award.'
  And when this worthy knight Virginius,
Heard the decree of this judge, Appius,
That he by force must his dear daughter give
Up to the judge, in lechery to live,
He went back home, and sat down in his hall,
And anon had them his daughter call;
And with a face dead as ashes cold
Her humble face did silently behold,
A father's pity striking through his heart,
Yet from his purpose he could not depart.

'Daughter,' quoth he, 'Virginia, by thy name,
There are two ways before you, death or shame,
One you must suffer – alas, that I was born!
For you have not deserved this evil morn,
Yet must you die by sword or by the knife.
O dear daughter, ender of my life,
Whom I have nurtured with such joyous glance
You were never out of my remembrance,
O daughter, you who are my final woe,
And of my life are my last joy also,
O gem of chastity, with quiet patience
Embrace your death: such is my sentence.
For love, not hate, I would have you dead;
My pitying hand must strike off your head.
Alas, that ever Appius saw your face!
That is why he falsely judged the case' –
He told her all the tale you've heard before.
No need for me to tell you of it more.
'O mercy, dear father!' quoth the maid,
And with that both her arms she laid
About his neck, as she was wont to do.
The tears burst from her eyes, anew,
'Good father,' she cried, 'is it death for me?
Is there no grace? Is there no remedy?'
'No, none, dear daughter mine,' quoth he.
'Then give me time, father mine,' quoth she.
'To lament my death a little space.
For Jephtha he gave his daughter grace,
To lament before he slew her, alas!
And God knows she committed no trespass,
But ran, the first her father chanced to see,
To welcome him with great solemnity.'
And with these words she swooned anon.
And after, when her faintness was all gone,
She arose, and to her father said:
'Blessed be God that I shall die a maid!
Grant me death, before I come to shame.

Do with your child as you will, in God's name!'
  After those words she begged him full oft,
That with his sword he would smite soft;
And then again she fainted and lay still.
Her father with a sorrowful heart and will,
Struck off her head, gripped the hair, and went
To seek the judge, so as to present
Her head to him, being judge and jury,
And when the judge saw it, says the story,
He bade men to take and hang him fast.
But right anon a thousand people passed
Into the yard, to save the knight, for pity,
Since all was known of this false iniquity.
The people had suspicions that the thing,
From the way in which the rogue sought to bring
His charge, had the consent of Appius;
They knew too that he was lecherous.
And so to seek this Appius had they gone,
To throw him into prison right anon,
Where he slew himself; and Claudius,
Who was the servant to this Appius,
Was sentenced to hang upon a tree,
But Virginius, out of clemency,
Prayed that instead he might be exiled;
Or else for sure he would have died reviled.
The rest were hanged, the greater and the less,
Who were accessories to this wickedness.
  Here may men see how sin receives its due!
Beware, no man knows what rank or who
God will smite, nor in what manner or wise;
The worm of conscience may yet arise
Against the wicked life, though secretly
So no man knows of it but God and he.
For be he illiterate or be he learned,
He knows not how soon the blow is earned.
Therefore I advise you this counsel take:
Forsake sin, before sin may you forsake.

Here ends the Physician's Tale

The Physician-Pardoner Link

The words of the Host to the Physician and the Pardoner

ur Host began to swear as he were mad;
'By nails and blood,' quoth he, 'your tale is sad!
This was a false rogue and a false assize!
As shameful a death as heart may devise
Come to these judges and their advocates!
And yet this faultless maid has met her fate!
Alas, too dearly did she buy her beauty!
Wherefore I always say that men may see
That the gifts of Fortune and of Nature
Have caused the death of many a creature.
From both the gifts that I spoke of now
Man often has more harm than good I vow.
'But truly now, my own master dear,
That was indeed a piteous tale to hear!
And to pass on, now, is scarce a curse.
I pray, God bless your noble person, first,
Your glass urinals, and sundry vessels,
Your hippocras too, and your cordials,
And every box of your apothecary's –
God bless them, and our Lady Saint Mary!
For, may I prosper, you're a proper man,
And like a prelate, by Saint Ronian!
Say I not well? I cannot use your terms
But I know you gave my heart such a turn,
That I have almost caught a *cardiacle*.
By God's bones, unless I dose a little,

Or drink a draught of moist and malted ale,
Or hear anon a somewhat merrier tale,
My heart is lost for pity of this maid!
You *bel ami*, you, Pardoner,' he said,
'Give us some mirth or jest now, right anon.'
'It shall be done,' quoth he, 'by Saint Ronian.
Yet first,' quoth he, 'here at this inn's ale-stake,
I will both drink and eat a piece of cake.'
But now from the gentlefolk there rose a plea:
'Nay let him tell us no obscenities!
Tell us some moral thing, let there appear
Some wisdom, and then we will gladly hear.'
'Granted, indeed,' quoth he, 'but I must think
Of some decorous thing while I go drink.'

The Pardoner's Prologue

Here follows the Prologue to the Pardoner's Tale

'Radix malorum est Cupiditas:'
'For the love of money is the root of all evil.'

(1 Timothy 6:10-520)

' ordings,' quoth he, 'in churches when I preach,
I take great pains to make a forceful speech,
And ring it out as soundly as a bell,
For I know all by rote, the tale I tell.
My theme is ever one, and always was:
"*Radix malorum est cupiditas*."
First I pronounce from whence it is I come,
And then my bulls I show them, all and some.
Our liege lord's seal is upon my patent
That I show first, as my bodily warrant,
So that none's so bold, priest nor clerk,
As to disturb me in Christ's holy work,
And after that, then I tell forth my tales.
Bulls of the popes and of cardinals,
Of patriarchs and bishops too, they view,
And in Latin I speak a word or two,
To season, as with saffron, declamation,
And stir them to reveal all their devotion.
Then I show forth my large crystal flagons,
Crammed full to the top with rags and bones;
Relics they are, adored by everyone.
Then I have in brass a shoulder-bone,
Belong to a holy Jew's dead sheep.
"Good men," say I, "note of my words now keep:
If that this bone be washed in any well,
If cow, or calf, or sheep, or ox should swell
That any worm has eat, or snake has stung,
Take water from that well and wash its tongue,
It will be whole anon; and furthermore,
Of pox and scabs and every other sore
Shall every sheep be whole that of this well
Drinks a draught. Take note of what I tell:
If the good man that the beasts do follow
Shall every week, before the cockerels crow,
Fasting too, drink of this well a draught,
As this holy Jew our elders taught,

His beasts and his stock will fruitful be.
  And, sires, also it heals the jealousy;
For though a man descend to jealous rage,
Let him add this water to his pottage,
And nevermore shall he mistrust his wife,
Though the truth of all her sin be rife,
And even though she's had a priest or three.
  Here is a mitten too, as you can see;
He that his hand will put inside this mitten,
His grain shall multiply, as it were written,
Where he has sown, whether it's wheat or oats,
If he makes offering of pence or groats.
  Good men and women, one thing though I vow;
If anyone is in this church right now
Who has done dreadful things, that he
Dare not, for shame of it, confess to me,
Or any woman, be she young or old,
Who has made of her husband a cuckold,
Such folk shall have no power and no grace
To make offering to my relics in this place.
And whoever's free of all such blame,
May come and make an offering, in God's name,
And I absolve them, by the authority
This papal bull has granted unto me."
  By this trick have I gained, year on year,
A hundred marks since I made Pardoner.
I stand like a cleric in my pulpit,
And after the unlettered people sit,
I preach thus as you have heard before,
And tell a hundred false stories more.
Then I take to stretching forth my neck,
And east and west nod with due effect,
Just like a dove sitting on a barn.
My hands and tongue then work so hard
That it is a joy to view the business.
Of avarice and all such wickedness
Is all my preaching, thus to set them free

To give their pence, and namely, unto me.
For my intent is only gain to win,
Not to correct them when they chance to sin.
For I care nothing, at their burying,
Whether their souls have gone blackberrying!
And certainly, many a declamation
Arises oftentime from ill intention:
Sometime to pleasure folk with flattery,
And gain advantage through hypocrisy,
Sometimes for vainglory, sometimes hate.
For when I dare not otherwise debate,
I'll sting him with my tongue and sharp
Preaching, so that he'll not flee far
From false slander, if it seems that he
Has offended my brethren now, or me.
For though I never speak his proper name,
Men shall know the person, all the same,
By signs and by other circumstances.
Thus I pay out folk who lead us dances;
Thus I spit out my venom with the hue
Of holiness, to seem holy still and true.
  But briefly my intent I here confess:
I preach, but only out of covetousness.
Therefore my theme is now, and ever was:
"*Radix malorum est cupiditas*."
Thus do I preach against the very vice
I too indulge in, which is avarice.
Though I myself am guilty of that sin,
Yet I have power these other folk to win
From avarice, and bitterly to repent.
Yet that is not my principal intent;
I preach only out of covetousness.
Enough now of that subject, I suggest.
  Then I give examples many a one
Out of old stories from the times long gone.
For unlettered people love the tales of old;
Such things they can repeat, their minds can hold.

What! Think you, that while I can preach,
And gain gold and silver as I teach,
I would live in poverty wilfully?
Nay, nay, I've never thought so, truly!
For I can preach and beg in sundry lands.
I need never labour with my hands,
Nor make baskets, just to make a living,
Since not un-fruitfully I can go begging;
None of the apostles shall I counterfeit.
I must have money, wool, cheese and wheat,
Though it were given by the poorest page
Or the poorest widow in some village,
Though her children starve from famine.
Nay, I must drink the liquor of the vine,
And have a jolly wench in every town!
  But hearken, lordings, in conclusion now:
Your pleasure is that I should tell a tale.
Now I have drunk a draught of malted ale,
By God, I hope to tell you of a thing
That shall with reason be to your liking!
For though myself I am a sinful man,
Tell you a moral tale? Well, that I can:
One that I am wont to preach for gain.
Now hold your peace; and I'll begin again.'

The Pardoner's Tale

Here begins the Pardoner's Tale

n Flanders once there was a company
Of younger folk given all to folly,
Such as riot, gambling, brothels, taverns,
Where to the harps and lutes, and to citherns,
They danced, and played at dice both day and night,
And ate and drank more than wise men might,
Offering thereby the devil sacrifice
Within that devil's temple of cursed vice,
With superfluity abominable.
Their oaths were so great and damnable
That it was terrible to hear them swear;
Our blessed Lord's body thus they'd tear –
As though the Jews had not torn him enough –
And each of them at other sinners laughed.
And then anon came female tumblers,
Slender and elegant, young fruiterers,
Singers with harps, bawds, wafer-sellers,
Who are the devil's very own officers,
To kindle and blow the fire of lechery,
Which is annexed indeed to gluttony.
The Holy Writ I take now as my witness
There's lechery in wine and drunkenness.
  See, how your drunken Lot unnaturally
Lay with his two daughters, unknowingly;
So drunk was he, he knew not what he wrought.
Herod, whoever of the tale knows aught,
When he was replete with wine at a feast,

At his own table ordered, like any beast,
The slaying of John the Baptist, guiltless.
Seneca too says a good thing, doubtless:
He says, there's no difference he can find
Between some fellow who has lost his mind
And one who is a drunkard through and through,
But says that madness, when it overcomes you
Lasts longer than does ever drunkenness.
O gluttony, so full of wickedness!
O thou reason for our first confusion!
O original cause of our damnation,
Till Christ bought us with his blood again!
See, how costly, briefly to explain,
The payment for that cursed villainy;
Corrupted was this world by gluttony.
  Adam our father, and his wife also,
From Paradise, to labour and to woe,
Were driven for that vice, it's so indeed.
For while Adam fasted, as I read,
He was in Paradise, and when he
Ate the forbidden fruit from the tree,
Then he was cast out to woe and pain.
O gluttony, of whom we should complain!
O, if men knew how many maladies
Follow from excess and gluttony,
They would be more temperate and careful
In their diet, when they sit at table.
Alas, the narrow throat, the tender mouth
Mean men east and west, and north and south,
In earth, air, water, labour, as I think,
Simply to bring a glutton food and drink!
Of this matter, O Paul, you also treat:
'Meat for the belly, and the belly for the meat,
But God shall destroy both.' So Paul says.
Alas, a foul thing it is, by my faith,
To speak the word, and fouler is the deed,
When man so drinks of white and red indeed,

That of his throat he makes his privy
By reason of cursed superfluity.
  The Apostle says, whom weeping softens:
'For many walk, of whom I've told you often,
And now tell you, even weeping, that they
Are enemies of the cross of Christ always:
Whose ending is destruction, and whose God
Is their belly!' O womb, O stinking pod,
Filled full with dung and with corruption,
At either end, foul is the eruption!
What labour and cost it is your meat to find!
These cooks, how they stamp and strain and grind,
To turn God's substance into accident,
To quench your avid lust, by their talent.
Out of the hard bone the marrow they
Knock, for nothing of it is thrown away
That softly, sweetly may the gullet suit.
Spices of every leaf, and bark, and root
Shall help to make the sauces of delight
That feed again a newer appetite.
And surely he who lives on such spices
Is dead, while he lives among these vices.
  A lecherous thing is wine, and drunkenness
Is full of strife and of wretchedness.
O drunken man, disfigured is your face,
Sour is your breath, and foul is your embrace!
And through your nose issues a dull tone
As though you said: 'Sampson, Sampson'.
– And yet, God knows, Sampson drank no wine.
You fall to the ground like a fresh-stuck swine;
Your tongue is lost, and every decent care,
For drunkenness is the very sepulchre
Of a man's reason and discretion.
He, over whom drink has domination,
Can keep no counsel, as is truly said.
So keep you from the white and from the red,
The white from Lepé, Spain, then, set aside

That they sell in Fish Street and Cheapside!
That wine of Spain creeps most subtly, ay,
Into the other wines they cask nearby,
From which there rises such fumosity
That when a man has drunk of glasses three,
And thinks himself at home in Cheapside,
Yet he in Spain, in Lepé town, will abide –
Not at La Rochelle, nor in Bordeaux's sun –
And then he will drone out: 'Sampson, Sampson.'
But hearken, lordings, one word more I pray,
Know the sovereign acts, all, I dare say,
Of victory in the entire Old Testament,
Won through God who is omnipotent,
Were won in abstinence and prayer.
Look to your Bible, and find it there.
Look at Attila, the great conqueror,
Dead in his sleep, in shame and dishonour,
Bleeding from his nose in drunkenness;
A general should be sober, I'd suggest!
Moreover, consider now right well,
What was commanded of Lemuel –
Not Samuel, but Lemuel say I –
Read your Bible, see there if I lie,
On wining those with whom justice lies.
No more of this, let my words suffice.
And now that I have spoken of gluttony,
Now will I warn you about gambling's lottery.
Gambling's the very mother of lying,
And of deceit and cursed forswearing,
Blaspheming Christ, manslaughter, waste also
Of property and time, and further know,
It is shame and contrary to honour,
To be known as a common gambler,
And ever the higher his estate,
The more is he shunned and desolate.
If a prince choose to play the lottery,
In all his governance and policy,

He is held, by common opinion,
As the last of all in reputation.
  Stilbon, who was a wise ambassador,
Was sent to Corinth, with all honour,
From Lacadaemon, to make alliance,
And on arrival, it occurred by chance
That all the greatest men of that land
He found gambling, with the die in hand.
So, as soon as might reasonably be,
He stole home again to his own country,
And said: 'There I'll not lose my name,
Nor will I take on me so great a shame
As to ally you with all these gamblers.
Send some other wise ambassadors;
For, in truth, indeed, I'd rather die
Than I should you to gamblers ally.
You who are so glorious in honours
Shall not ally yourselves with gamblers
By any will of mine, nor any treaty.'
That wise philosopher, so said he.
  Look also to that King Demetrius:
The King of Parthia, as books tell us,
Sent him a pair of golden dice in scorn,
Since he'd shown as a gambler before;
For which reason his glory and renown
He valued naught, nor his reputation.
Lords can find other, better ways to play
Honest enough to pass the day away.
  Now will I speak of oaths false and great
A word or two, as the old books treat.
Swearing is a thing abominable,
And perjury is even more objectionable.
God on high forbade swearing at all;
Witness Matthew, but you may recall
That to which Jeremiah gave breath:
'And thou shalt swear, as the Lord liveth,
In truth, in judgement, and in righteousness.'

But idle swearing is pure wickedness.
Behold and see, how in the first table
Of God's commandments honourable,
The third commandment was written plain:
'Thou shalt not take the Lord's name in vain.'
See how He rather forbade such swearing
Before homicide, and other cursed things!
I say that higher in the list it stands;
This they know who know His commands,
That God's third commandment is that.
And moreover, I will tell you flat
That vengeance shall fall on all his house
Whose oaths and swearing are outrageous.
'By God's precious heart, and by his nails,
And by the blood of Christ that is at Hailes,
Seven's my number, yours is five and three!
By God's arms, if you play false with me,
This sharp dagger through your heart shall go!'
Such is the fruit of those two cursed bones:
Perjury, anger, cheating, homicide.
Now, for the love of Jesus Christ who died
For us, leave off your oaths, great or small.
But sires, now of my tale will I tell all.
  These three profligates of whom I tell,
Long before prime rang out from any bell,
Had sat down in a tavern for a drink.
And as they sat, they heard a bell clink
Before a coffin carried to the grave.
Then one of them called to his knave:
'Go quickly,' quoth he, 'and ask reply
As to whose corpse this is passing by;
And remember the name aright, as well.'
  'Sire,' quoth the boy, 'no need that they tell;
I heard it before you came these two hours,
He was, in truth, an old friend of yours,
Who was suddenly slain the other night,
Drunk, as he lay upon his bench upright.

There came a sly thief whom men call Death,
Who in this country steals people's breath,
And with his spear his heart he smote so,
And on his way without a word did go.
He slew a thousand with the pestilence.
And, master, ere you reach his presence,
I think it very wise and necessary
To be wary of such an adversary.
Be ready to meet him at every door –
So my mother taught me; now, no more.'
'By Saint Mary!' said the innkeeper,
'The child is right, for he has slain this year,
Barely a mile from here, in a large village,
Men and women, children, serfs at tillage.
I think his habitation must be there.
It would be wise indeed to take care,
Lest he should do a man dishonour.'
'What, God's arms,' quoth the reveller,
'Is it so perilous then with him to meet?
I'll seek him on the highway, in the street,
I make this vow by God's noble bones!
Hearken, friends, we three are all as one:
Let each man hold his hand up to the others,
And each to each become as brothers.
And we shall slay this false traitor Death!
He shall be slain, who steals men's breath,
By God's dignity, ere it be night!'
Together the three their troth did plight,
To live and die each of them for the other,
As though he were his own born brother,
And up they leapt, all drunk and in a rage,
And forth they went towards the village
Of which the innkeeper had told before.
And many a grisly oath then they swore,
And Christ's blessed body tore and rent;
Death shall die: to catch him their intent!
When they had gone barely half a mile,

Just as they were about to leap a stile,
An old man, a poor man, there they met.
The old man humbly paid them his respects,
And spoke thus: 'Now lords, may God protect ye!'
  The proudest then of these profligates three
Answered again: What, knave of sorry grace!
Why are you all cloaked save for your face?
Why have you lived so long, in your old age?'
  The old man stared hard into his visage,
And spoke thus: 'Because I cannot find
Any man, though I have walked to Inde,
Neither in city, nor in distant village,
Who will exchange his youth for my age.
And therefore have I all my years still,
As long as it may further the Lord's will.
No death, alas, will take away my life!
So I wander on, wretched, and in strife,
And at the ground, which is my mother's gate,
I knock with my staff, both early and late,
Crying: "Dear mother, please let me in!
See, how I waste, flesh and blood and skin!
Alas, when shall my bones be at rest?
Mother, with you I would exchange the chest
That in my chamber has a long time been
Yea, for a hair-shirt to wrap round me!"
– But yet to me she will not show that grace,
And so all pale and wrinkled is my face.
  But sires, you show a lack of courtesy
In speaking to an aged man, so harshly,
Unless he's trespassed in word or deed.
In holy writ, too, you yourself may read:
"Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head",
Therefore I give you my advice, 'tis said,
Unto an old man no harm should you do,
More than you would have men do unto you
In age, if here it chance you long abide.
And God be with you, where you go or ride!

I must go thither where I have to go.'
'Nay, old churl, by God, you shall not so!'
Cried the other profligate, anon.
'You leave us not so lightly, by Saint John!
You spoke just now of that traitor Death,
Who in this country steals away men's breath;
You have my word, as you are his spy,
Say where he is or you'll pay by and by,
By God, and by the Holy Sacrament!
For truly you are both joined in consent
To slay us younger folk, you false thief!'
'Now, sires,' quoth he, 'if it is your chief
Wish to find Death, take this crooked way,
For in that grove I left him, by my faith,
Under a tree, and there he will abide;
No bluster of yours will make him hide.
See you that oak? Just there you shall him find.
God save you, He that redeemed all mankind,
And amend you!' – So said the aged man.
And every one of the profligates then ran
Till they came to the tree, and there they found
Of florins fine, of gold new-coined and round,
Well nigh eight bushels, was what they thought.
No longer then after Death they sought,
But each of them was pleased so at the sight,
Since the florins gleamed so fair and bright,
That down they sat beside the precious hoard.
The wickedest of them spoke the first word:
'Brethren' quoth he, 'take note of what I say;
My wit is great, though I may jest and play.
This treasure now to us has Fortune given,
In mirth and jollity our life to live: then,
Lightly as it comes, so shall we spend.
By God's precious dignity, this day's end,
Who'd have thought it would bring so fair a grace?
Now might this gold be carried from this place,
Home to my house – or else to yours –

For now you see that all this gold is ours –
Then would we be in high felicity.
Yet certainly, by day that may not be.
Men would say we were thieves all along,
And for our own treasure have us hung.
This treasure must be carried off by night,
As carefully and cunningly as we might.
So I suggest that lots among us all
We draw, and see how the lots may fall;
And he of the short straw, with heart blithe
Shall run to the town, and swift and lithe,
And bring us bread and wine secretly.
And two of us will guard cunningly
This treasure well, and, if he not tarry,
When it is night we shall this treasure carry,
By our consent, wherever we think best.'
  Then one of them held the straws in his fist,
And bade them draw, see how the lots might fall;
The shortest fell to the youngest of them all,
And forth towards the town he ran anon.
And as soon as ever he was gone,
One of them spoke thus to the other:
'You know that you are my sworn brother;
I'll tell you where you profit lies anon.
You know that our fellow is clean gone,
And here is gold, and that in great plenty,
Which is to be shared among us three.
Yet if it seemed that I could shape it so
That it were only shared between us, though,
Would I not show myself a friend to thee?'
  'The other answered him: 'How can that be?
He knows the gold is here, while he's away;
What could we do? What could we hope to say?'
  'Shall it be secret?' said the worst of the two,
'And in a few words I'll explain it you,
What we shall do to bring it all about.'
'I agree,' said the other, 'have no doubt,

You, by my oath, will I not betray.'
'Now,' quoth the first, 'we be two, I say,
And two of us then are stronger than one.
Look, when he is seated, then right anon
Rise as though with him you would play;
And I will stab him through the side, this way,
While you are struggling with him, as in game,
And with your dagger look you do the same.
And then this gold shall be shared, you see,
My dear friend, just between you and me.
Then we can both our wishes thus fulfil,
And play at dice according to our will.'
And so the two rogues agreed, and they
Planned to slay the third, as you heard say.
The youngest, while he ran towards the town,
Often in his thoughts rolled up and down
The beauty of those florins new and bright.
'O Lord,' quoth he, 'if only that I might
Have all this treasure for myself alone,
There is no man that lives beneath the throne
Of God who would live as merry as me!'
And at last the fiend, our deadly enemy,
Put in his thoughts, that he should poison buy,
With which to slay his fellows by and by,
Because the fiend found his way of living
Was such he'd power to set him sorrowing.
For this was wholly his complete intent:
To kill them both, and never to repent.
And off he went – no longer would he tarry –
Into the town to an apothecary,
And requested of him that he sell
Him poison, a host of rats to quell,
And also there was a polecat in his yard,
That, so he said, had pressed his chickens hard,
And he would take revenge, if he might,
On vermin that stole from him at night.
The apothecary answered: 'You'll take away

The Rioter

A compound that, as God my soul may save,
Is such that in all this world there's no creature
That has eaten or drunk of this mixture
Merely the quantity of a grain of wheat,
Who did not his life at once forfeit.
Yes, die he must, and in a shorter while
Than it would take you to walk a mile,
The poison is so strong and violent.'
  The cursed wretch then swiftly went,
With this poison in a box, in his hand,
Into the neighbouring street to a man,
From whom he borrowed large bottles three,
And into two the poison then poured he;
The third he left empty for his drink,
For a full night's labour he did think
To spend transporting gold from that place.
And when this profligate, with sorry grace,
Had filled with wine his large bottles three,
To his fellows he returned and swiftly.
  Why make a longer sermon of it more?
Exactly as they'd planned his death before,
Right so they slew him and that anon.
And when it was done, thus spoke the one:
'Now let us sit and drink, and be merry,
And afterwards we will his body bury.'
And with those words, he chanced, alas,
To seize a bottle where the poison was,
And drank, and poured his friend a drink too,
So that they died, both of them, the two.
  Surely, I must suppose, Avicenna
In no chapter of his *Canon*, ever
Wrote of more wondrous signs of poisoning
Than these wretches showed, ere their ending.
Thus died both these homicides, we know,
And then the traitorous poisoner also.
  O cursed sin above all cursedness!
O treacherous homicide, O wickedness!

O gluttony, gambling, and lechery!
You blasphemers of Christ, in villainy
Swearing out of habit and of pride!
Alas, mankind, how may this betide,
That to your Creator, He who first wrought
You, and with his precious heart's blood bought
You again, you're so false, unkind, alas?
  Now good men, God forgive you your trespass,
And shield you from the sin of avarice!
My holy pardon will save you from vice,
So long as you offer up gold and sterling,
Or else silver brooches, spoons and rings.
Bow your head beneath this holy bull.
Come forward wives, make offerings of wool;
Your name I enter here in my roll anon.
Into the bliss of heaven will you be gone;
I absolve you by my sovereign power –
You that offer wool – made pure as the hour
When you were born – And lo, sires, thus I preach.
And Jesus Christ, our healer, our soul's leech,
May He grant you His pardon to receive,
For that is best, I will not you deceive.
  Sires, one thing was forgotten in my tale:
I have relics, pardons in my bale,
As fair as does any man in England,
Which were given me by the Pope's hand.
If any of you would, out of devotion,
Make offering and have my absolution,
Come forth anon, and kneel you here adown,
And humbly receive my sovereign pardon;
Or else receive it as your way you wend,
All new and fresh at every mile's end –
As long as you offer, new and new,
Nobles or pence, that are both good and true.
It is an honour to everyone that's here,
To have found a competent pardoner,
To absolve you, through the country as you ride,

From any accidents that may betide.
Peradventure there may fall one of you
Down from his horse, and break his neck in two.
Look, what a safeguard it is to you all
That I am of your fellowship, on call,
Who can absolve you, the first and last,
When the soul shall from the body pass.
I think that our Host shall first begin,
Since he most enveloped is in sin.
Come forth, Sir Host, and offer up anon,
And you shall kiss the relics, every one,
Yes, for a groat! Unbuckle then your purse.'
'Nay, nay,' quoth he, 'I'd rather have Christ's curse!
Let be!' quoth he, 'You'll have not what you seeketh!
You'd have me kissing your old breeches,
And swearing they were a relic, sainted,
Though by your fundament they're painted.
By Saint Helena's cross, from Holy Land,
I would I had your bollocks in my hand
Instead of relics or some reliquary!
Have them cut off, them I'll help you carry
And they shall be enshrined in a hog's turd!'
The Pardoner answered him not a word;
So wrathful was he, no word could he say.
'Now,' quoth our Host, 'I will no longer play
With you, nor any other angry man.'
But right anon the worthy knight began,
When he saw how all the folk did laugh,
'No more of this, words enough you'll have!
Sir Pardoner, be glad and merry of cheer,
And you, Sir Host, who are to me so dear,
I pray you now come kiss the Pardoner.
And Pardoner, I pray you now, draw near,
And as we did before, let's laugh and play.'
Anon they kissed, and rode forth on their way.

Here is ended the Pardoner's Tale

The Shipman's Tale

Here begins the Shipman's Tale

merchant once there was at Saint-Denis,
Whom men thought wise, for he was wealthy.
A wife he had too, of excellent beauty,
And sociable, and fond of fun was she –
Which is a thing that causes more expense
Than all the close attention and reverence
Is worth, that they receive at feasts and dances.
Such salutations and such countenances
Pass as do the shadows on a wall.
But woe to him then who must pay for all!
The foolish husband always has to pay;
He must clothe us and provide display,
All for his own reputation, richly,
Display amongst which we dance, jollily.
And if he cannot pay, peradventure,
Or else such expense will not endure,
But thinks it wasted, and money lost,
Then must another man pay our cost,
Or lend us gold, and that is perilous.
This noble merchant ran a worthy house,
Because of which such crowds were always there,
For his largess, and since his wife was fair,
It was a wonder; hearken to my tale!
Amongst his guests, the female and the male,
There was a monk, a handsome man and bold –
I guess he was but thirty winters old –
And constantly attracted to the place.

This young monk, who was so fine of face,
Had become so friendly with the husband,
Since their acquaintance first began,
That he was welcomed as familiarly
In his house, as any friend could be.
  And inasmuch as this good husband,
And the monk whose tale I just began,
Were both of them born in the same village,
The monk would claim him as a relative,
And he the same; he never said him nay,
But was as glad of it as bird of day,
For to his heart it was sweet circumstance,
That thus they forged eternal alliance,
And each of them the other did assure
Of brotherhood while life should so endure.
  Free was monk John, and liberal of expense,
When in that house, and full of diligence
To do what pleases, and so pay his wages.
He never forgot the lowliest of pages,
In all that household, each in his degree
He dowered, the lord and all his company,
Whenever he came, with some generous thing.
So that they were as glad at his arriving
As the birds are when the new sun rises.
No more of that for now, since it suffices.
  It so befell, this merchant one fine day
Was readying all his travelling array,
Towards the town of Bruges for to fare,
To buy there a portion of his wares;
And so to Paris he had sent anon
A messenger, requesting of Sir John
That he should come to Saint Denis, and stay
With him and with his wife, beyond a day,
Before he left for Bruges, as he must do.
  This noble monk, whom I describe to you,
Won from his abbot, as requested, licence,
Because he was a man of great prudence

An abbey officer, appointed so to ride,
To check the barns and granges, far and wide;
And to Saint Denis came he anon.
Who was as welcome as my lord Sir John,
Our dear cousin, full of courtesy?
With him he brought a jar of fine Malmsey,
Another too, a white, Italian vintage,
And wild-fowl as well, as was his usage.
And so leave them to eat and drink and play,
The merchant and the monk, the livelong day.
  On the third day, this merchant rises
And of his duties sadly himself advises,
And up into his counting-house goes he,
To reckon up, himself, as it must be,
How the year had gone with him, and stood,
And how much he'd expended of his goods,
And whether he'd made a profit or made none.
His books, and bags of coin, many a one,
He laid before him on his counting-board.
Full rich was his treasure and his hoard,
And so he kept the counter-door fast shut;
And wished no man to come and interrupt
His casting of the accounts, for some time.
And so he sat there till well after prime.
  Sir John had risen in the morn also,
And walked about the garden to and fro,
While making his devotions all devoutly.
  The good wife came walking covertly
Into the garden where he wandered softly,
And saluted him, as she had frequently.
A maid child came with her for company,
Whom she might govern as she pleased,
For yet under the rod was the maid.
'O dear cousin mine, Sir John,' she said,
'What ails you, so early do you rise?'
  'Niece,' quoth he, 'really it should suffice
For me to sleep five hours of a night,

Except I were some old enfeebled fright,
As are those married men, who cower there,
As in a form might sit a weary hare
Tormented by the hounds in the vale.
But dear niece, why are you so pale?
I might guess, for sure, that our good man
Had laboured with you so, since night began,
That you have need of rest now, and swiftly.'
And with these words he laughed right merrily,
And with his own thoughts he waxed all red.
  The fair wife began to shake her head,
And said thus: 'Ah, God knows all,' quoth she.
Nay, cousin mine, it stands not so with me!
For, by the God that gave me soul and life,
In all the realm of France there is no wife
That finds less pleasure in that sorry play;
For I may sing "alas!" and "well-away
That I was born!" but to no one', quoth she
'Dare I tell how things truly stand with me.
So that I think out of this land to wend,
Or else of my own self to make an end,
So full am I of fear and of care.'
  Hearing this, the monk began to stare,
And said: 'Alas, my niece, God forbid
That you for any sorrow or for dread
Should kill yourself; come, tell me all your grief.
Peradventure I may give you some relief
Or counsel in your trouble, so tell me
All your problems, speak them privately.
For on my breviary I swear an oath,
That never in all my life, to friend or foe,
Any secret of yours shall I betray.'
  'The same again to you,' quoth she, 'I say.
By God and by this breviary I swear,
Though men me into pieces all would tear,
That I shall never, may I go to Hell,
Betray a single word to me you tell,

Not for our kinship, no, nor alliance,
But truly out of love and affiance.'
So were they sworn, and thereupon they kissed,
And each told the other what they wished.
'Cousin,' quoth she, 'if that I had a space
Of time – as I have not, here in this place –
Then would I tell the story of my life,
How I have suffered since I was a wife
With my husband, though he is your cousin.'
'Nay,' quoth the monk, 'by God and Saint Martin,
He is no more a cousin unto me
Than is this leaf hanging from the tree!
I call him so, by Saint Denis of France,
To have better reason for acquaintance
With you, whom I love, especially,
Above all women, and so most deeply;
This I swear to you, by my profession.
Tell me your grief, give it full expression,
Lest he come: quick, then go your way anon.'
'My dear love,' quoth she, 'O my Sir John,
It were better this secret for to hide,
But it must out; it may no more abide.
My husband is to me the vilest man
There ever was since the world began!
But since I'm his wife, it befits not me
Ever to compromise our privacy,
Neither in bed nor any other place.
God forbid I should tell, by His grace!
A wife should not speak about her husband
Except in honour, as I well understand.
But to tell you this much, well I shall:
So help me God he is worth naught at all,
Not even, I say, the value of a flea.
But what grieves me most, he's niggardly!
And you know well, that women naturally
Desire six things, indeed, like to me:
They desire their husbands should be

Brave, wise, and rich, and liberally free,
Obedient to their wives, and fresh in bed.
But by the same Lord that for us bled,
For his honour, to dress in fine array,
On Sunday next it's necessary I pay
A hundred francs, or else I die forlorn.
Yet it were better I had not been born,
Than be subject to slander or villainy.
And if my husband aught of this should see,
I'd be lost; and therefore you I pray,
Lend me the sum, or I must die today.
Sir John, I say, lend me this hundred francs;
In faith, I will not fail of my thanks,
If that you choose to do what I pray.
For on the date you set I will repay,
And do whatever pleasure and service
I may do you, such as you shall request.
And if I do not, God take on me vengeance,
As foul as that earned by Ganelon of France!'
  The noble monk answered in this manner:
'Now truly, my own lady, and my dear,
I have' quoth he, 'such pity for you, my oath
I swear to you, and plight to you my troth
That, when your husband does to Flanders fare,
I will deliver you from all this care,
For I will bring you the hundred francs.'
And with these words he caught her by the flanks,
And embraced her hard, and kissed her fiercely.
'Go now your way,' quoth he, still and softly,
'And let us dine, soon as ever we may,
For by my dial it's past the prime of day.
Go now, and be as true as I shall be.'
  'God forbid it otherwise, sire,' quoth she;
And forth she went as pert as a magpie,
And bade the cooks be swift, that by and by
Men might sit and dine, and that anon.
Off to her husband then the wife was gone,

And knocked at his counting-house door boldly.
'*Qui la*?' quoth he. 'Why, Peter, it is me'
Quoth she; 'What, sire! How long now must you fast?
How much longer reckon up and cast
Your sums, and all your books and things?
Devil take all such devilish reckonings!
You have enough, in faith, from God's own hand;
Come down today, and let your coffers stand.
Aren't you ashamed now that our good Sir John
Is fasting wretchedly all this day gone?
What! Let's hear a Mass, and go and dine.'
'Wife,' quoth the man, 'little can you divine
The complicated business that we run;
For of us merchants, God save all and one,
And by the lord that is called Saint Ive,
Scarcely two in every twelve may thrive
Continually, and it last to our old age.
We must ever show a cheerful visage,
And seem to take the world as it will be,
And veil our own affairs in secrecy,
Till we are dead, or else we must go play
At pilgrimage, or hide ourselves away,
And therefore it's a prime necessity
For me to judge this strange world carefully.
For evermore we must live in dread
Of mishap and ill Fortune on our head.
To Flanders shall I go tomorrow day,
And then return as soon as ever I may.
For which reason, wife, I do beseech,
You to all men be courteous and meek,
And, to guard our property, be zealous,
And govern well and honestly our house.
You have enough of all, in ever wise,
That for a thrifty household should suffice.
You lack nothing here in clothes or victuals;
The silver in your purse too shall not fail.'
And with that his counter-door he shut,

And down he went then, with ready foot.
Then and there a Mass was swiftly said,
And speedily the tables all were spread;
And to break their fast they quickly sped;
And sumptuously this monk the merchant fed.
  After the dinner, Sir John, soberly,
Took the merchant aside, and privately
Spoke to him thus: 'Cousin, it stands so,
I see indeed to Bruges you mean to go.
God and Augustine speed you then and guide!
I pray you, be careful, cousin, how you ride;
Govern yourself also, in your meat,
Temperately, especially in this heat.
Between us two need nothing formal fare.
Farewell, cousin, and God shield you from care!
And if there's anything, by day or night,
That lies within my power and my might,
Which you command of me, in any wise,
It shall be done, just as you shall advise!
  One thing, before you go though, indulge me,
I wonder, now, if you might lend me
A hundred francs, for a week, since I
Have certain cattle that I must buy,
To stock a certain farm that is ours –
God help me so, I wish it were yours!
I must not fail to settle on the day,
Not if it were a thousand francs, I say.
But let this thing be hidden from the eye,
For yet tonight these creatures I must buy.
And now farewell, my own cousin dear;
Graunt merci for your loan and good cheer.'
  The noble merchant courteously anon
Answered, saying: 'O cousin mine, Sir John,
Now this is indeed but a small request!
My gold is yours to do as you think best,
And not only my gold but all my wares;
Take what you wish, don't leave yourself spare!

But one thing more, let me remind you now,
That, with merchants, our money is our plough.
We may have credit while we have a name,
But to lack gold, well that's another game.
So pay it again when you can with ease;
In every way I can I wish to please.'
The hundred francs he fetches forth anon,
And covertly conveys them to Sir John.
No one in all this world knows of the loan,
Save the merchant and Sir John alone.
They drink and speak, walk a while and play,
Till, to his abbey, Sir John rides away.
The morrow comes, forth does the merchant ride
On Flanders road; his prentice as his guide
Until he reaches Bruges full merrily.
Now goes the merchant fast and busily
About his business, buys, and pays advances.
He neither plays at dice, there, nor dances,
But like a merchant, briefly for to tell,
He leads his life; and there I'll leave him dwell.
The very next Sunday after he'd gone,
To Saint-Denis returned the good Sir John,
With his beard and tonsure freshly shaved.
In all that household, from the littlest knave
To every other there, the joy was plain
At seeing my lord Sir John back there again.
And swiftly to the point right for to go,
The fair wife settled with Sir John also
That for the hundred francs he should all night
Hold her in his arms tight, till it was light.
And this accord was acted out in deed;
In mirth all night a busy life they lead
Till it is day, Sir John goes on his way,
Bidding the household all: 'Farewell, good day!'
– For none of them, no person of that town,
Had of good Sir John the least suspicion.
And forth he rode and homeward to his abbey,

Or where he pleased; no more of him from me.
  The merchant, when he'd finished his affairs,
To Saint Denis rides off, and there repairs;
And with his wife seeks feasting and good cheer,
Tells her the merchandise has proved so dear,
He must negotiate a fresh advance
For he is bound by a recognisance
To pay down twenty thousand crowns anon.
And so the merchant was to Paris gone,
To borrow from certain friends whom he had,
A sum of francs, to those he took to add.
And when that he was come unto the town,
Out of the love and the great affection
He had for Sir John, he went to him that day –
Not to ask gold of him, or borrow, say,
But to enquire there about his welfare,
And tell him of his merchandise and wares,
As friends do, when their friends are near.
John welcomed him with feast and merry cheer,
And he in turn described, with detailed tally,
What wares he'd bought, most successfully
Thanks be to God, and all fine merchandise;
Save that he must, in some manner of wise,
Obtain a loan, for all was of the best,
And joyfully thus set his mind at rest.
  Sir John replied: 'Well then, I'll say plain
It's good that you're in health, and home again.
And if I were rich, so may I have bliss,
Twenty thousand crowns I'd never miss,
In loans to you, since kindly, the other day,
You lent me gold; and as I can and may
I thank you by God and by Saint James!
Yet nonetheless, I say, I took our dame,
Your wife at home, the same amount again,
Paid on your bench; by certain tokens plain
I could tell you of, she'll know it well.
Now, by your leave, I may no longer dwell

Upon the matter, our abbot travels anon,
And in his company I must be gone.
Greet our dame for me, my own niece sweet,
And fare thee well, dear cousin, till we meet!'
  The merchant, prudent in affairs like this,
Borrowing money, now paid out in Paris
To certain Lombards, placed it in their hands,
The sum of gold, received his bond as planned,
And home he went, merry as a popinjay,
For he knew he must, in the normal way
Of business, turn a more than average
Profit, a thousand francs or so, he'd gage.
  His wife was there and met him at the gate,
As she was wont to do, early and late,
And all that night long, in mirth they met,
For he was rich, and free of all his debt.
When it was day, the merchant did embrace
His wife afresh, and then he kissed her face,
At her he went, and played a little rough.
  'No more!' quoth she, 'by God, you have enough!'
And wantonly again with him she played,
Till, at the last, thus the merchant said:
'I'm angered somewhat' quoth he, 'by my oath,
With you, my wife, although as ever loth
To criticise. And why? Well, as I guess,
You've brought about a kind of awkwardness
Between me and my cousin good Sir John.
You should have warned me, ere I was gone,
That he a hundred francs to you had paid
By ready tokens, and was quite dismayed
When I spoke about a loan to be advanced –
Or so it seemed from his wry countenance.
Yet, nonetheless, by God, our Heavenly King,
I'd had no wish to ask for anything.
I pray you wife, next time do not do so;
Tell me always, ere that from you I go,
Of any debtor who may in my absence

Have paid you, lest by your negligence
I ask him for what he's already paid.'
  The wife was unfazed and unafraid,
And boldly she said, and that anon:
'Marry, I defy the false monk, Sir John!
I care naught for his tokens. It befell
He gave me certain coins, I know it well –
What then? Evil fall on his monk's snout! –
For, God knows, I thought, without a doubt,
That they were given to me because of you,
To do me honour, and benefit me too,
From cousinship, and also the good cheer
He has so often had when he was here.
But since it seems the thing is all disjoint,
I'll answer you briefly now, and to the point.
You've many a slacker debtor than me,
For I will pay you well and readily
From day to day; and if so ever I fail,
I am your wife, tally it on my tail,
And I will pay as soon as ever I may.
For, by my oath I have, on fine display,
But not extravagance, as thus befell,
Spent every bit, and spent it all so well
For your honour, that, for God's sake, I say
Do not be angry, let us laugh and play.
You'll have my sweet body as pledge instead;
By God, I'll only pay you thus, in bed!
Forgive me then, my own spouse, my dear;
Turn hitherward, and show better cheer.'
  The merchant saw there was no remedy,
And to chide her for it merely folly,
Since the thing could not amended be.
'Well, wife,' he said, 'I forgive it thee;
But by your life, the bills make not so large.
Guard our wealth better; so I you do charge.'
Thus ends my tale now, and may God us send
Tal(ly)ing enough unto our own life's end! Amen.

Here ends the Shipman's Tale

The Shipman-Prioress Link

Behold the merry words of the Host to the Shipman and to the Lady Prioress

‘ ell said, by Corpus Dominus!’ quoth our Host.
‘Now, long may you sail about our coast,
Sir gentle master, gentle mariner!
God give the monk a cartload of bad years!
Aha, my friends, be wary of such japes!
In the merchant’s hood our monk loosed an ape,
And in his wife’s too, by Saint Augustine;
Ask no more monks to any house you’re in.
But now, pass on, and let us seek about
For who will next tell, of all this rout,
Another tale’ – and after that he said,
As courteously as if he were a maid:
‘My Lady Prioress, by your leave,
If that I knew it would not truly grieve,
I would judge it fitting that you should
Tell the next tale, if it so be you would.
Now will you agree, my lady dear?’
‘Gladly,’ quoth she, and spoke as you shall hear.

THE PRIORESS'S PROLOGUE

THE PROLOGUE TO THE PRIORESS'S TALE

Domine dominus noster: O Lord, our Lord

(Psalm 8)

'O Lord, our Lord, your name how marvellous
It is, far spread in this great world!' quoth she,
'For not only is your praise, most precious,
Celebrated by men of dignity,
But in the mouths of children your bounty
Is celebrated too; for at the breast sucking
Sometimes they'll display their thanksgiving.

Wherefore in praise, as best I can or may,
Of Thee and of the white lily flower
Who bore Thee, and is a maid always,
To tell a tale I'll now turn my labour –
Not that I may thus increase her honour,
For she herself is honour, the fountain
Of worth, next her Son, the soul's salvation.

O mother-maid, O maiden-mother free!
O bush un-burnt, burning in Moses' sight,
That drew down in joy from the Deity,
Through your humility, in you to alight,
The Holy Ghost, of whose power, your heart-light,
Was conceived the Father's Sapience,
Help me to speak, and show you reverence.

Lady, your worth, and your magnificence,
Your virtue, and your great humility,
No tongue may express, nor no science.
For often lady, ere men pray to thee,
You go before them, in benignity,
And obtain the light for us of prayer
To guide us towards your Son so dear.

My skill's so weak, O my blissful Queen,
Ever to declare your great worthiness,
That I may not the weight of it sustain,
But like a child but twelve months old or less,
That can scarce a single word express,
So then am I; and therefore I now pray,
Guide my song of you, as on I say.

THE PRIORESS'S TALE

HERE BEGINS THE PRIORESS'S TALE

here was in Asia, in a great city
Of Christian folks, a ghetto for Jewry,
Maintained by a lord of that country,
For shameful profit out of foul usury,
Hateful to Christ and all his company.
And through its streets men might ride and wend,
For it was free, and open at either end.

A little school of Christian folk there stood
Down at the farther end, in which there were
A crowd of children, born of Christian blood,
Who learned in that school, year by year,
Such manner of doctrine as men used there –
That is to say, to sing and then to read,
As little ones when children do, indeed.

Among these children was a widow's son,
A little schoolboy, seven years of age,
Who day by day off to the school would run,
And also whenever he saw the image
Of Christ's mother, as was common usage
And taught to him, would kneel down and say
His *Ave Maria*, as he passed by the way.

Thus had the widow her small son taught
Our blissful lady, Christ's mother dear,
To worship ever; and he'd forgotten naught,
For innocent children are quick to hear
Such things. And I remember in this matter,
Saint Nicholas, who is ever in my presence,
Who though young showed Christ due reverence.

This little child, his little book studying,
As he sat in school over his primer,
Alma redemptoris heard others singing,
Learning the antiphon from their reader;
And close as he dared he drew near and nearer,
And harkened to the word and the notes,
Till he had learnt the first verse by rote.

He'd no grasp of what the Latin might say,
Being so young, and of so tender an age;
But one morning he asked a friend, if, pray,
He might expound the song in his language,
And tell him why it was in common usage.
He begged him to construe it and declare
Its meaning, often down on his knees bare.

His friend, who was older than was he,
Answered him thus: 'This song, I have heard say,
Was made about our blissful Lady free,
To salute her, and also to her pray
To be our help and succour always.
I can expound no further of this matter;
I know the song; but have no grasp of grammar.'

'And is this song made in reverence
Of Christ's mother?' asked the innocent.
'Then I'll employ all my diligence
To learn it all ere Christmastide is spent,
Though from my primer I must be rent,
And shall be beaten thrice in an hour,
I will learn it, Our Lady for to honour.'

His friend taught him it privately
Each day as they went home, till by rote
He knew it, then sang it well and boldly,
Every word, according to the notes.
Twice a day it passed through his throat,
School-ward and homeward as he went;
On Christ's mother set was his intent.

As I have said, among the Jewry,
This little child, as he went to and fro,
Full merrily then would he sing and cry
'*O alma redemptoris*' and ever so.
The sweetness had pierced his heart, lo,
Of Christ's mother, so that he must pray
To her, nor leave off singing by the way.

Our first foe, Serpent Satan, who has
Made in the Jew's heart his wasp's nest,
Swelled up and said, 'O Hebrew folk, alas!
Is this a thing that seems to you full honest,
That such a boy shall walk by, as if blessed,
In spite of you, and sing out each sentence
That goes against the laws you reverence?'

From thenceforth the Jews there conspired
The innocent from out this world to chase.
A murderer, to serve this end, they hired,
Who in an alley had a private place,
And as the child passed by at a pace,
This wretched Jew caught and held him fast,
And cut his throat, and in the pit him cast.

Into a privy-drain him they threw,
Where the Jews purged their entrails.
O cursed folk of Herod, born anew,
How shall your evil intent you avail?
Murder will out, for sure, and shall not fail
God's honour, there, especially for to speed,
The blood cries out against your cursed deed.

O Martyr, bonded to virginity,
Now you may sing, ever following on
The white Lamb celestial – quoth she –
Of which the great evangelist, Saint John
Of Patmos, wrote, who says those who are gone
Sing before the Lamb a song all new,
Who never, in the flesh, women knew.

The poor widow waited all that night
For her little child, but he came not.
So, as soon as ever it was light,
Her face pale with dread, in anxious thought,
She, at the school and elsewhere, him sought;
Till this much she discovered, finally,
That he had last been seen among the Jewry.

With mother's pity in her breast enclosed,
She went, and she was half out of her mind,
To every place where she might suppose
It likely that she might her child find;
And ever on Christ's mother, meek and kind,
She cried, and at the last thus she wrought:
Among the cursed Jews she him sought.

She begged, and she prayed piteously
Of every Jew who dwelt in that place,
To tell her if her child had been by.
They said 'nay' but Jesus, of His grace,
Put in her mind, within a little space,
To go from that place, where she cried,
To where he was, in the pit, cast aside.

O Great God, that hears Your praise performed
Through innocent mouths, lo, here is Your might!
This gem of chastity, this emerald,
And of martyrdom this ruby bright,
Lay there with his throat cut, upright,
And *Alma redemptoris* did he sing
So loud that all the place began to ring.

The Christian folk who through the streets went
Came crowding for wonder at this thing,
And swiftly for the provost then they sent.
He came anon, without tarrying,
While praising Christ, who is of Heaven king,
His mother also, honour of mankind,
And after that the wretched Jews did bind.

The child, with piteous lamentation
Was lifted up, singing his song always;
And with honour in a great procession
Carried to the abbey ere close of day.
His mother, swooning, by his bier lay;
Scarcely could the people with a tear
Drag this second Rachel from his bier.

With torment and shameful death each one
The Provost sentence on the Jews did serve
Who of the murder knew, and that anon.
Death for such wickedness he must observe.
Evil shall have what evil does deserve;
So with wild horses he did them draw,
And hung them then, according to the law.

Upon his bier still lay this innocent,
Before the altar while the Mass did last,
And after that the Abbot with his convent,
Hastened them to bury him full fast.
And when they holy water on him cast,
The child spoke, sprinkled with the water,
And sang: '*O alma redemptis mater*'.

The abbot then, who was a holy man,
As monks are – or else they ought to be –
The little child to beseech began,
Saying: 'O, dear child, I entreat thee,
By virtue of the Holy Trinity,
Tell me what allows you thus to sing,
Since your throat is cut, as seems the thing?'

'My throat is cut through to the neck-bone,'
Said the child, 'in the manner of mankind,
I should have died – and long ago be gone.
But Jesus Christ, as you in books will find,
Wills that His glory last, be kept in mind;
And for the worship of his mother dear,
I may yet sing "*O alma*" loud and clear.

That well of mercy, Christ's mother sweet,
I have loved always, after my knowing;
And when my death I was about to meet,
She came to me, and bade me for to sing
This anthem in truth while I was dying,
As you have heard; and when I had sung
She laid a grain of seed upon my tongue.

And so I sing, and sing I must again,
In honour of that blissful maiden free,
Till from my tongue is removed that grain.
And after that, thus she spoke to me:
"My little child, I will come to fetch thee
When that the grain from your tongue they take.
Be not afraid; I will not thee forsake.'"

The holy monk – the abbot, I mean he –
Touched his tongue, and so removed the grain,
And thus he gave up the ghost full softly.
And when the abbot saw this wonder plain,
His salt tears trickled down like rain,
And down he fell flat upon the ground,
And still he lay, as if he had been bound.

The convent of monks lay on the pavement
Weeping, praising Christ's mother dear.
And after that they rose, and forth they went,
And took up the martyr from his bier.
And in a tomb of marble polished sheer
They enclosed his little body sweet.
There he is now, God grant we may meet!

O young Hugh of Lincoln, slain also
By cursed Jews, a tale still notable,
Since it was but a little while ago,
Pray for us too, we folk to sin so liable,
That, in His mercy, God all merciful
Grant us great mercy, and never vary,
In reverence for his mother Mary. Amen.

Here ends the Prioress's Tale

The Prioress-Sir Topaz Link

Behold the merry words of the Host to Chaucer

hen told was all this miracle, every man
Was sobered so, it was a sight to see;
Until our Host to jest again began,
And for the first time now he looked at me,
And 'What manner of man are you,' quoth he.
'You look as though you seek to start a hare,
For ever on the ground I see you stare.

Come nearer, and look up now merrily!
Attend, sires, and find this man a place!
He in the waist is formed as well as me;
This were a poppet now in her embrace
For any woman small and fair of face!
He seems elvish by his countenance,
For with no one does he make dalliance.

Speak somewhat now, since other folks have said;
Tell us a tale of mirth, and that anon!'
'Host,' quoth I, 'may you be not dismayed:
Of other tales, I'm certain, I know none,
Only a rhyme I learned, in times long gone.'
'Well, that is fine,' quoth he, 'now we shall hear
Some dainty thing, by your face, it would appear.'

SIR TOPAZ

HERE BEGINS CHAUCER'S TALE OF TOPAZ

isten lords, with good intent,
And I will tell, all truly meant,
  Of mirth and of solace,
All of a knight fair and pleasant
In battle and in tournament;
  His name was Sir Topaz.

Born was he in a far country,
In Flanders, all beyond the sea,
  Poperinge was the place.
His father was a man full free,
And lord he was of that country,
  By God's eternal grace.

Sir Topaz was a doughty swain;
White was his face as flour again,
  His lips red as the rose.
And his complexion showed a stain,
Of scarlet red, and I'd maintain
  He had a seemly nose.

His hair was, as his beard, saffron,
And to his girdle tumbled down;
  His shoes Cordovan plain.
Of Bruges was his hose rich brown;
His robe of silken fabric found,
  That cost as much again.

He was skilled at hunting deer,
And hawking wildfowl on the mere
  With grey goshawk on hand.
And a good archer, never fear;
At wrestling no man was his peer,
  When any prize might stand.

Full many a maiden bright in bower,
Pined for him, hour after hour,
  That should have been asleep.
But he was chaste, beyond their power,
And sweet as is the bramble-flower
  From which the red hips peep.

And it befell, upon a day,
Truthfully, as I truly say,
  Sir Topaz took a ride.
He mounted on his steed, a grey,
And in his hand his lance at play,
  A long sword by his side.

He spurred through a pleasant forest,
In which lurked there many a beast –
  Yea, both buck and hare.
And as he spurred to north and east,
His luck, I tell you, almost ceased
  And fate brought sorry care.

There, herbs were springing in the vale,
The liquorice and ginger pale,
  And many a clove its offer,
And nutmeg, to improve the ale,
No matter whether fresh or stale,
  Or to lay up in coffer.

There all the birds did sing away,
The sparrow-hawk and popinjay,
  A joy it was to hear.
The throstle warbled out his lay;
The wood-pigeon on the spray,
  She sang full loud and clear.

Sir Topaz fell in love-longing,
Whenever he heard the throstle sing,
  Galloped fast as he could.
His fair steed with all his pricking,
Sweated till his flanks were wringing;
  His sides were wet with blood.

Sir Topaz then so weary was
From galloping upon soft grass,
  So fierce was his courage,
That down he laid him there, alas,
To give his charger some solace,
  Where there was good forage.

'O Saint Mary, *benedicitee*!
Why is love then so against me
  And binds me now so sore?
I dreamed all this night, pardee,
An Elf-Queen shall my lover be,
  Stay by me evermore.

An Elf-Queen will I love, like this,
For in this world no woman is
  Worthy my mate to make,
    In town.
All other women I forsake,
And an Elf-Queen to me shall take,
  By dale and by down.'

Into his saddle he climbed anon,
And over stile and stone is gone,
  An Elf-Queen for to see;
Till he so long has ridden on
That to a secret place he's won
  The country of Faerie
        So wild.
For in that country was there none
That dared to ride to him or come,
  Neither wife nor child.

Till there arrived a mighty giant;
His name it was Sir Oliphant,
  A perilous man indeed.
He said, 'Child, by Termagant,
If you be not gone from my haunt,
  Anon I slay your steed
        With mace.
Here there is the Queen of Faery,
With harp and pipe and hurdy-gurdy,
  Dwelling in this place.'

The Knight said: 'May it prosper me,
For tomorrow I'll meet with thee,
  When I have my armour.
And yet I hope, *par ma fay*,
That with this lance I here display
  You'll pay for it full sore.
        Your maw
I will pierce, and if I may,
Ere it be full prime of day,
  Here you will breathe no more.'

Sir Topaz galloped off full fast;
The giant at him stones did cast,
  Out of a deadly sling.
But fair escaped this Child Topaz,
Though through God's grace it was,
  And his noble bearing.

THE SECOND FIT

ow listen, lordings, to my tale;
Merrier than the nightingale,
Whisperings I will sound,
How Sir Topaz, slim and pale,
Pricking over hill and dale
Is come again to town.

His merry men commanded he
To cheer him there with games and glee,
For he must needs go fight
A giant with dreadful heads three,
For love, and as a votary
Of one that shone full bright.

'Come, music now that never fails,
And jesters too to tell their tales,
While I am here arming,
Of romances in hidden vales,
Of popes and of cardinals,
And of love and liking.'

They fetch him first the sweet wine,
And in a maple-bowl combine
With royal spicery
Gingerbread that is full fine,
And liquorice, and cumin: vine
And all that's sugary.

Next his white flesh did appear
Good linen cloth, both fine and sheer,
  Breeches and a shirt.
A jacket next the shirt so frail,
And over that a coat of mail,
  For fear of piercing hurt.

And over that a fine hauberk,
All wrought close, of Jewish work,
  Full strong it was of plate.
And over that his coat-armour,
As white as is the lily flower,
  To show his warlike state.

His shield was all of gold so red,
And thereon was a boar's head,
  A carbuncle beside.
And there he swore on ale and bread,
How that the giant would be dead,
  Betide what might betide!

His leg-pieces were leather each,
His sword's sheath was of ivory,
  His helm of brass, all bright;
His saddle too in ivory done,
His bridle as the sun it shone,
  Or as the full moon's light.

His spear it was of good cypress,
That spoke of war and not of peace,
  The head full sharply ground.
His steed it was a dapple grey;
It ambled gently on the way,
  Full softly, all around,
        In hand.
Lo, lordings mine, here is a fit!
If you would any more of it,
  I'll tell if it I can.

THE THIRD FIT

ow hold your tongues, *par charitee*,
Both you sir knight, and lady free,
And hearken to my spell,
Of battle and of chivalry,
And wooing too of a lady,
Anon, I will you tell.

Men speak of romances like this,
Of Horn Child, and of Ipotis,
Of Bevis and Sir Guy,
Of Libeus and Pleindamour –
But Sir Topaz, he was the flower
Of royal chivalry!

His charger fine he now bestrode,
And forth upon his way he glowed,
Like sparks from out the flame.
Upon his crest he had a tower,
And stuck therein a lily flower;
God shield his arm from shame!

And since he was a knight errant,
He stayed not in a house, but went
To sleep, wrapped in his hood.
His helmet bright was his pillow,
His warhorse fed, as you will know,
On herbs both fine and good.

He drank water from the well,
As did the knight Sir Perceval,
  So worthy neath his coat.
Till on a day –

The Topaz-Melibee Link

Here the Host halts Chaucer in his Tale of Topaz.

' o more of this, for God's great dignity!'
Quoth our Host now, 'since you weary me
With all your tiresome arrant foolishness,
And also, in truth, and God my soul bless,
My ears are aching with your paltry speech!
Rhymes like that the devil himself must teach!
That must be what's called doggerel,' quoth he.
'Why so,' quoth I, 'Why then hinder me
More in my tale then any other man? –
Since I give you the best rhyme that I can.'
'By God,' quoth he, 'said plainly, in a word,
Your idle rhyming isn't worth a turd!
You do nothing else but waste our time.
Sire, in a word, you shall no longer rhyme.
Try some heroic tale, let me suggest,
Or tell something in prose, if that were best,
In which there is some mirth or some doctrine.'
'Gladly,' quoth I, then, 'by God's sweet pain!
I shall tell you a little thing in prose,
That you may like, or so I would suppose,
Or else, indeed, you're too fastidious.
It is a moral tale and virtuous,
Although it's told sometimes in disguise
By sundry folk, as you may realise.
For as you know each Evangelist writes
In telling of the pain of Jesus Christ,

Something different than his fellow does;
And yet his substance is as true for us,
All agree in their essential substance,
Although in telling they reveal a difference.
For some of them say more and some say less,
When they his piteous Passion do express –
I mean by 'they', Mark, Matthew, Luke and John –
And yet the substance of their words is one.
  Therefore, lordings all, I you beseech,
If the tale, you think, I vary in my speech –
Thus: though I employ a quantity more
Of proverbs than you have heard before
Included in this little treatise here,
To strengthen the effect of my matter –
And though the words are different I say
Than those you've heard, yet to you all I pray
Blame me not; for as concerns my substance,
You shall nowhere find any difference
From the substance of the treatise I cite,
After which this merry tale I indite.
And therefore, hearken well to what I say,
And let me tell all of my tale, I pray.'

The Tale of Melibee

Translator's note: The following extract is provided to illustrate the style of this prose homily or moral debate, of about a thousand lines or so. The principal subject is the question of whether revenge is the right course when harm has been incurred. The content covers the correct attitude to take (the purification of the heart), the identification of sound advice (the avoidance of false friends), whether women are to be trusted (husbands should be directed by their wives), whether revenge is dangerous, justifiable, or expedient in this case, and in parenthesis why God permits evil (the outcome of violence is uncertain. It is better to settle with one's enemies). The moral outcome is that vengeance belongs to God. The piece ends with Melibee's forgiveness of his enemies.

HERE BEGINS CHAUCER'S TALE OF MELIBEE

young man called Melibeus, mighty and rich, begat upon his wife, who was called Prudence, a daughter who was called Sophie. One day, it befell that for his sport he went into the fields to play. His wife and daughter he had left in the house, of which the doors were fast shut. Three of his old foes had seen this, and set ladders to the walls of his house, and entered by the windows, and beat his wife and wounded his daughter with five mortal wounds in five sundry places – that is to say, in her feet, in her hands, in her ears, in her nose, and in her mouth – and left her for dead and went away.

When Melibeus returned to his house and saw all this mischief, renting his clothes like a madman, he began to weep and cry. Prudence, his wife, besought him, as much as she dared, to cease his weeping, but nonetheless he wept and cried, ever longer and more. His noble wife, Prudence, remembered a judgement of Ovid's in his book that is called the Remedy for Love (*Remedia Amoris*), where he says: 'He is a fool that disturbs a mother weeping for the death of her child till she has wept her fill for a while, and then shall a man do his best to comfort her with amiable words, and beg her to cease her weeping.' For which reason, this noble wife Prudence suffered her husband to weep and cry a while, and when she saw her opportunity she spoke to him in this wise: 'Alas, my lord,' quoth she, 'why make yourself foolish? For, truly, it is not fitting for a wise man to show such sorrow. Your daughter, with the grace of God, will recover and escape death. And even if she were dead right now, you ought not to destroy yourself on account of her death. Seneca says: 'The wise man shall not take too great discomfort on the death of his children, but he should suffer it indeed in patience, as well as he must endure the death of his own person.'

Melibeus answered anon and said: 'What man,' quoth he 'should cease weeping that has so great a cause to weep? Jesus Christ, our Lord, himself wept for the death of Lazarus his friend.' Prudence answered: 'Certainly moderate weeping is not forbidden him who is sorrowful, but rather it is granted him to weep. The Apostle Paul unto the Romans writes: "Man shall rejoice with them that make joy, and weep with such folk as weep." But

though moderate weeping is allowed, excessive weeping is indeed forbidden. Moderation should be considered in weeping, according to the rule that Seneca teaches us. "When your friend dies," quoth he, "let your eyes be not too moist with tears or too dry; although the tears come to your eyes, let them not fall. And when you have lost a friend, endeavour to make another friend; this is wiser than to weep for the friend you have lost, for there is no benefit in that." And therefore, if you govern yourself with wisdom, put away sorrow out of your heart. Remember that Jesus, son of Sirach, says: "A man that is joyous and glad in heart continues to flourish in his old age, but truly, a sorrowful heart makes his bones dry." He says also thus, that sorrow at heart slays full many a man. Solomon says, that just as moth in the sheep's fleece harms the clothes, and the small worms the tree, just so sorrow harms the heart. Wherefore on the death of our children as well as in the loss of our temporal goods we should have patience. Remember the patience of Job, who when he had lost his children and his temporal substance, and in his body received and endured full many a grievous tribulation, yet said he thus: "Our Lord gave, our Lord has taken it from me; as our Lord has willed, so is it done. Blessed be the name of our Lord!""

At these aforesaid things, Melibeus replied to his wife Prudence: 'All your words,' quoth he, 'are true and therefore profitable, but truly my heart is troubled with this sorrow so grievously that I know what to do.' 'Summon all your true friends,' quoth Prudence, 'and those of your kindred who are wise' explain your situation, and hearken to what they say in counsel, and govern yourself according to their judgement. Solomon says: "Work everything by counsel and you shall never repent.'"

Then, by the counsel of his wife Prudence, Melibeus summoned a great congregation of folk, surgeons, physicians, old folk and young, and some of his old enemies, reconciled, apparently, to his love and to his grace. And with them came some of his neighbours, who paid him reverence more from fear than from love, as is often the case. There came also many subtle flatterers, and wise advocates learned in the law. And when these folk were gathered together, Melibeus, in sorrowful wise explained his situation. And by the manner of his speech it seemed that he bore a cruel anger in his heart, ready to wreak vengeance on his foes, and desired that conflict should immediately begin, but nonetheless he still asked counsel upon the matter.

A surgeon, by permission and assent of such as were wise, rose, and spoke to Melibeus as you may now hear: 'Sire,' quoth he, 'it is enjoined on us surgeons that we do the best we can for everyone who employs us, and do no harm to our patients. So that it happens often that when two men have each wounded the other, the same surgeon treats them both. So that,

in our art, it is not appropriate to nourish conflict or support any one party. But, as to the treatment of your daughter, even though she be so perilously wounded, we shall be so attentive to the business day and night that with the grace of God she shall be whole and sound as soon as is possible. In almost exactly the same way the physicians answered, save that they said a few words more: that just as maladies are cured by their opposites, so shall men heal conflict by vengeance.

His neighbours, full of envy, his feigned friends who seemed reconciled, and his flatterers, made a semblance of weeping, and worsened and exaggerated the matter, by praising Melibeus greatly for his might, his power, his riches and his friends, despising the power of his adversaries, and saying emphatically that he should anon wreak vengeance on his foes and begin the conflict.

Up rose then an advocate who was wise, by permission and counsel of others who were wise, and said: 'Lordings, the cause for which we have been assembled in this place is a high and heavy matter, because of the wrong and wickedness that has been done, and by reason of the great harm that in coming time may possibly arise from the same cause, and also by reason of the great riches and power of both parties; for which reason it would be a great peril to err in this matter. Wherefore, Melibeus, this is our opinion: we counsel you above all that right anon you do your best to defend your own person in such a wise that you lack neither spy nor guard, to protect your body. And after that we counsel that in this house you set sufficient garrison so that they can as well your body as your house defend. But, to instigate war, or to wreak sudden vengeance, we cannot in so short a time decide if it were profitable. Wherefore we ask leisure and space to deliberate in this case in order to decide, for the common proverb says thus: "He that judges quickly, shall quickly repent." And also men say that the judge is wise who understands a matter rapidly, but judges at leisure. For although all delay is irritating, it is never to be reproved in the giving of judgement or in vengeance-taking, when it is sufficient and reasonable, and that our Lord Jesus Christ showed by example. For when the woman that was taken in adultery was brought into his presence to know what should be done with her person, although he knew how he should answer, yet he would not answer instantly, but he wished for deliberation, and he wrote on the ground twice. And for this reason we ask for deliberation, and we shall then by the grace of God advise what shall be profitable.' Up started then the young folk, at once, and the most part of that company scorned the wise old man, and began to make a noise, and say that since while the iron is hot men should smite, so should men wreak vengeance for their wrongs while they are fresh and new; and in a loud voice they cried: 'War, war!'

Up rose then one of the old wise men, and with his hand made a sign that men should be still and grant him audience. 'Lordings,' quoth he, 'there is full many a man that cries: "War, war!" that little knows what war involves. War at its inception has so high and wide an entrance, that every man may enter when he likes and easily find war. But, truly, what end shall befall, is not easily known. For truly, when war is once begun, there is many a child yet unborn that shall die young because of that war, or else live in sorrow, and die in wretchedness. And therefore, before any war is begun, men should take counsel and deliberate deeply.' And when this old man thought to strengthen his point with reason, almost at once they rose to put an end to his speech, and bade him cut short his words, for truly he that preaches to those that listen not to his words, his sermon only annoys. For Jesus son of Sirach says that music with weeping is an irritating thing; that is to say, it is much use to speak to folk who are annoyed by the speech, as it is to sing to those who weep. And when this wise man saw that he lacked an audience, he sat down again in shame. For Solomon says: 'Where you will find no audience, do not attempt to speak.' 'I see, truly,' quoth this wise man, 'that the common proverb is true, that good counsel is lacking when it is most needed.' Yet, in his council, Melibeus had many folk that gave their opinion privately in his ear, and counselled him in a contrary manner to the general audience.

When Melibeus heard that the majority of his council were agreed that he should make war, anon he consented to their opinion, and fully affirmed their judgement. Then Dame Prudence, when she saw her husband planning to wreak vengeance on his foes and to make war, she, when she saw her opportunity, spoke these words to him, most humbly: 'My lord,' quoth she, 'I beseech you as heartily as I can and dare, do not hasten so fast, as you hope to prosper, and give me audience. For Petrus Alfonsi says: "Whoever does to you either good or harm, hasten not to repay it, for in this way your friend will abide, and your enemy live longer in fear." The proverb says: "He hastens well, who knows how to wait wisely", and "In wicked haste there is no profit."'

Melibeus answered his wife Prudence thus: 'I purpose not, 'quoth he, 'to work according to your counsel, for many causes and reasons; everyone would consider me a fool, for certain – that is to say, if I were to change things that have been ordained and affirmed by so many wise men. Secondly I say that all women are wicked, and none of them good, for "Of a thousand men," says Solomon, "I found one good man, but among all women, good women found I never." And also, if I attended to your counsel, it would surely seem that I had given you mastery over me, and God forbid that were so! For Jesus of Sirach says that if the wife has mastery, she goes contrary to her husband. And Solomon says: "Never give power over yourself, ever in your life, to your wife, or child, or friend, for it

were better that your children asked of you what they needed, than you find yourself in the hands of your children." And also, if I were to work according to your counsel, my counsel must surely remain secret for some time till it were time that it were known, and this may not be.

For it is written, that women's talkativeness can hide nothing except what they are ignorant of. Later, the Philosopher says that women overcome men with evil counsel; and for these reasons I must not follow your advice.'

When Dame Prudence, meekly and with great patience, had heard all that her husband wished to say, then she asked permission of him to speak, and spoke thus: 'My lord,' quoth she, 'as to your first reason, it may surely be easily answered; for I say that it is no folly to amend counsel when the matter changes, or else when the matter seems otherwise than before. And moreover, I say that though you have promised and sworn to carry out your enterprise, even though you abandon that same enterprise for a just reason, men should not say therefore that you were a liar and a perjurer. For the book says, that the wise man is no liar if he turns his spirit towards the better outcome. And although your enterprise has been decided and ordained by a great multitude of folk, you need not carry out the decree unless you wish so to do; for the truth of things and the profit are rather found among the few who are wise and full of reason, than the great multitude of folk where every man cries out and chatters what he wishes. Surely such a multitude is not sensible.

And as to the second reason, where you say that all women are wicked, saving your grace, surely you despise all women in this way, and "He who despises all, displeases all", as says the book. And Seneca says that "Whoever shows sapience no man shall dispraise, but gladly teach the science that he knows without pride or presumption, and such things as he knows not, he shall not be ashamed to learn, and enquire of lesser folk than himself." And, Sire, that there have been many good women may easily be proved. For indeed, Sire, our Lord Jesus Christ would never have descended to be born of woman if all women were wicked; and then, because of the great virtue there is in women, our Lord Jesus Christ, when he rose from death to life, appeared to a woman rather than to his apostles……

End of the extract from the Tale of Melibee

The Monk's Prologue

The merry words of the Host to the Monk

hen ended was my tale of Melibee
And of Prudence and her benignity,
Our Host said: 'As a true Christian,
And by the precious *corpus Madrian*,
I'd rather my wife had heard this tale
Dear God, than have a barrelful of ale!
For she has never shown such patience
As did this Melibeus' wife Prudence.
By God's bones, when I beat my knaves,
She brings me the great knobbed staves,
And cries out: "Slay the dogs, every one,
And break their backs and every bone!"
And if there's any neighbour of mine
Who fails in church his head to incline,
Or is so bold as to commit trespass,
When she comes home she rages in my face,
And shouts: "False coward, avenge your wife!
By *corpus bones*, I'll go wield your knife,
And you shall have my distaff and go spin!"
Day and night that's how she'll first begin.
"Alas!" she'll say, 'that ever it was my fate
To wed a milksop, and a cowardly ape
Who sees himself outfaced, who never fights,
And daren't stand up, to honour his wife's rights!"
Such is my life, unless I choose to fight,
And out at door anon I must go, alright,
Or else I am but lost, I must bear me

Like a wild lion, and as foolhardily.
I expect some day she'll make me slay
A neighbour, and then I'll be on my way,
For I am dangerous with knife in hand,
Albeit that I dare not her withstand,
For she can heft an arm, by my faith;
As he'll find out who minds not what he sayeth!
– But let us pass on now from all this matter.
My lord the Monk,' quoth he, 'be merry of cheer,
For you shall tell a tale, by my eye.
Lo, Rochester is here, the town fast by!
Ride forth, my lord, don't break off the game.
Yet, by my troth, I know not your true name;
Whether I should call you my lord Sir John,
Or Sir Thomas now, or else Sir Alban?
Of what house are you, by your father's kin?
I swear to God you have a full fair skin!
They'll be gentle pastures to which you post;
You look not like a penitent or ghost.
Upon my faith, you are some officer,
Some worthy sexton, or some cellarer.
And by my father's soul, I'll have it known,
You'll be the master when you are at home –
No poor cloister-dweller, nor a novice,
But an official, a wily man and wise,
And, at that, not short of brawn and bone,
A fine looking person I must own.
I pray God, bring that man confusion
Who first taught you to seek religion!
You would have trodden the hens all right;
Had you licence as you have the might
To satisfy the need that is in nature,
You'd have begotten many a fine creature.
Alas, who draped you in so broad a cope?
God give me sorrow, but if I were Pope,
Not only you, but every mighty man,
Though he were tonsured when he first began,

Should have a wife: for all the world's forlorn!
Religion's cornered the market, all the corn
Of treading, and we laymen are but shrimps.
From feeble trees there come but wretched imps;
This makes our heirs, so feeble, so tender,
That feebleness they can scarce engender.
That is what prompts our wives to make assay
Of you religious folk, who can better pay
The debts that are due Venus than may we.
God knows, in no base coinage pay ye!
But be not wrath, my lord, this is but play;
Full oft there's truth in jest, so I've heard say.'
  The worthy Monk heard all with patience,
And said: 'I will with all due diligence,
As far as may conform with decency,
Tell you a tale now, or two or three.
And if you care to hearken, hitherward,
I'll tell you of the life of Saint Edward –
Or else, first, of some tragedy I'll tell,
Of which I have a hundred in my cell.
"Tragedy" is to say a kind of story,
Of which old books present the memory,
Of those who stood in great prosperity,
And fell then sadly from a high degree
Into misery, ending wretchedly.
And such are versified most commonly
With six feet, in *hexameters* are done,
In prose too is written many a one,
And other metres: many a sundry wise.
Lo, this explanation should suffice.
  Now hearken, if you wish for to hear!
But first I beseech in this matter, here,
If I should chance to speak of these things,
Whether of popes, emperors, or kings,
Out of the written order, that men find,
Telling some before and some behind,
As first they come to my remembrance,
Accept my excuses for my ignorance.'

THE MONK'S TALE

HERE BEGINS THE MONK'S TALE

De casibus virorum illustrium: of the fall of famous men

will bewail, in style of tragedy,
The fall of those who stood in high degree,
And fell such that there was no remedy
To raise them out of their adversity.
For when Fortune chooses us to flee,
There is no man her course can stay, I hold.
Let no man blindly trust prosperity!
Be warned by these examples true and old.

LUCIFER:

With Lucifer, though he an angel were,
And not a man, with him I shall begin;
For though Fortune no angel can impair,
From high degree yet fell he, for his sin,
Down into Hell, and he is still therein,
O Lucifer, brightest of angels all,
Now you are Satan, and may never win
Out of the misery that was your fall!

ADAM:

Lo, Adam in the field, Damascene,
With God's own finger wrought was he,
And not begot of man's sperm unclean,
And ruled all Paradise, save for one tree.
Never had worldly man such high degree
As Adam, till through his bad governance
He was driven from his prosperity
To labour, and to Hell, and to mischance.

SAMSON:

Lo, Samson, his birth annunciated
By the angel, long ere his nativity,
Was to Almighty God consecrated,
And stood forth nobly while he could see:
There was never another such as he,
As regards his strength, and hardiness.
But to his wives his secret told he,
And so he slew himself from wretchedness.

Samson, this noble all-conquering champion,
Without weapon save his hands, I say,
Slew, and then rent to pieces, a lion,
While walking to his wedding, by the way.
His wife would please him so, and pray
Till she his counsel knew; and she untrue
Unto his foes his counsel did betray,
And forsook him, and took another new.

Three hundred foxes Samson took, in ire,
And all their tails he tied up in a band,
And set the foxes' tails all on fire,
For he to every tail attached a brand;
And they burned all the corn in the land,
And all the olive-trees, and vines also.
A thousand men he slew with his hand,
With nothing but an ass's jaw-bone.

When they were dead, so thirsted him that he
Was near to death himself, and then did pray
That God would on his pain now take pity
And send him drink, or he must die that day.
And from the ass's jaw-bone, dry, I say,
Out of a back tooth, sprang anon a well,
Of which he drank enough, and was saved.
Thus God helped him, as *Judges* will tell.

By strength alone, at Gaza, then, one night,
Despite the Philistines in that city,
The town gates he tore up, in his might,
And carried them on his back, did he,
To a high hill, so anyone might see.
O noble all-conquering Samson, loved and dear,
Had you not told your secret, privately,
In all this world you would have had no peer!

Samson, he never cider drank nor wine,
Nor to his hair came shears or razor there,
By precept of the messenger divine,
For all of his great strength lay in his hair.
And fully twenty winters, year by year,
He had of Israel the governance.
But soon he had to weep many a tear,
For woman would bring him to mischance.

To Delilah, his lover, thus he told
How in his hair all his great strength lay,
And falsely to his foes she him sold;
And sleeping in a barn there, on a day,
She clipped and sheared his hair away,
And let his enemies all this trick espy.
And when he was weakened in this way,
They bound him fast, and quenched each eye.

And ere she did his hair both clip and shave,
There was no bond with which men might him bind.
Yet once he was imprisoned in a cave
They made him labour at the quern and grind.
O noble Samson, strongest of mankind,
O sometime Judge, in glory and in richness!
Now may you weep with eyes stone blind,
Since you are fallen to such wretchedness.

The end of this poor wretch was as I say:
His enemies made a feast, one fine day,
And made him as their fool before them play;
And this was in a temple, with great display.
But at the last, he made a fierce affray,
For two pillars he shook and made them fall;
And down fell temple and all, and there it lay,
And he slew himself and his enemies all.

That is, the Magistrates every one,
Three thousand others too, were there slain
Buried beneath the great temple of stone.
Of Samson's tale no more will I explain.
Be warned by this example old and plain
That none should tell his secrets to his wife,
Such things that he'd in secrecy retain,
Touching the safety of his limbs and life.

HERCULES:

Of Hercules, the sovereign conqueror,
His works sing his praise and high renown,
For, in his time, of strength he was the flower.
He slew and took the skin from the lion;
The Centaurs' vaunted pride he brought down.
The Harpies he slew, those cruel birds fell;
He stole the golden apples from the dragon;
And dragged Cerberus the hound from Hell.

He slew the tyrant, Diomede the vicious,
And made his horses eat him, flesh and bone;
He slew the fiery serpent venomous;
Of Achelous' two horns he broke one,
And he slew Cacus in his cave of stone;
He slew the giant Antaeus the strong;
He slew the grisly boar, and that anon,
And bore the heavens, on his neck, long.

Was never hero since the world began,
Who slew as many monsters as did he.
Through the whole wide world his name ran,
For both his strength and his great bounty,
And every realm he travelled for to see;
He was so strong no man might him fret.
At both the world's ends, says Trophee,
Instead of boundaries he a pillar set.

A lover had this noble champion,
She was Deianira, fresh as May;
And, as the scholars make mention,
She sent him a shirt, fresh and gay.
Alas! This shirt – alas, and well away! –
Envenomed was so subtly withal
That ere he had worn it half a day,
It made his flesh all from his bones fall.

But nonetheless, some writers make excuse
For her, saying it was Nessus' shirt in fact.
That being the case, I shall not her accuse;
But he wore this shirt on his naked back,
Till his flesh from the venom was all black.
And when he found no other remedy nigh,
On hot coals he lay down, since on the rack
Of venomous torment he scorned to die.

Thus fell the mighty, noble Hercules.
Lo, who of Fortune's dice may trust the throw?
For he that follows all this world, at ease,
Ere he's aware, is often laid full low.
Full wise is he that seeks himself to know!
Beware, for when Fortune shall dispose,
Then she waits her man to overthrow
By such means as he might least suppose.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR:

The mighty throne, the precious treasure,
The glorious sceptre, and royal majesty
That this King possessed, Nebuchadnezzar,
By human tongue can scarce described be.
He twice took Jerusalem the city;
The vessels of the Temple he then bade
Men take to Babylon his Sovereign See,
Where he his glory and his pleasure had.

The fine male children of the blood royal
Of Israel he gelded them anon,
Making every one of them his thrall.
Amongst others Daniel was one,
Who was the wisest child of anyone;
For he the dreams of the king expounded,
While in Chaldea wise man was there none
Who knew what end his dreams had sounded.

The proud king had a statue made of gold,
Sixty cubits long and seven in breadth,
To which image both the young and old
Were ordered to bow down, and bow in dread,
Or in a fiery furnace, burning red,
Be burnt if they chose to disobey.
But Daniel would not assent, instead
He and his two companions went their way.

The king of kings, was so proud and great
He thought that God who sits in majesty
Could never strip him of his high estate.
Yet suddenly he fell from dignity,
And like a beast then he seemed to be,
And ate hay like an ox, and all about,
In the rain, with wild beasts walked he,
Until all God's allotted time was out.

And like an eagle's feathers was his hair;
His nails like a bird's claws did appear,
Till God released him from his madness there,
Restored his wits; and then with many a tear
He thanked God, and lived his life in fear
Of acting thus amiss, of more disgrace;
And till the day he laid was on his bier,
He paid witness to God's might and grace.

BELSHAZZAR:

Now, his son, who was named Belshazzar,
And reigned there after his father's day,
Learned nothing himself from all that matter,
For proud he was of heart, and loved display.
And an idolater he was always.
His high estate filled his heart with pride;
But Fortune cast him down, and there he lay,
And his kingdom others did divide.

A feast he made once for his lords all
On a day, and they were blithe and merry,
And then to his officers he did call:
'Go, bring forth the vessels now,' quoth he,
'That my father in his prosperity
Out of the Temple in Jerusalem reft,
And to our gods give thanks must we
For the trophies our ancestors left.'

His wife, his lords, and his concubines
Drank on, while their appetites did last,
Out of those noble vessels, sundry wines.
And on a wall the king his eyes did cast,
And saw a hand, armless, that wrote full fast,
For fear of which he quaked and sighed full sore.
The hand that made Belshazzar all aghast
Wrote *Mene, Tekel, Peres*, and no more.

In all that land magician was there none
Who could expound what the letters meant.
But Daniel expounded it anon
Saying: 'King, God to your father lent
Glory and honour, kingdom, treasure, rent;
And he was proud, ignoring what God bade,
And therefore God His punishment He sent,
And bereft him of the kingdom that he had.

He was cast out of human company;
With asses was all his habitation,
In wet and dry, he ate like any beast,
Till he understood, by grace and reason,
That the God of Heaven has domination
Over every kingdom and every creature.
And then indeed God showed him compassion,
And restored his kingdom and his power.

And you, who are his son, are proud also,
And know all these things, certainly,
And are a rebel, and to God a foe.
You drink now from his vessels boldly –
Your wife as well, and wenches, sinfully
Drink from the same vessels sundry wines –
And worship the false gods wickedly;
Thus punishment will fall, this is the sign.

The hand was sent from God, that on the wall
Wrote *Mene, Tekel, Peres*, for, trust me,
Your reign is done; you weigh naught at all.
Divided is your kingdom, and shall be
To Medes and Persians given,' thus quoth he.
And that same night the King he was no more,
And Darius occupied his degree,
Though he thereto had neither right nor law.

Lordings, from this a moral you may take
That lordship none securely may possess.
For when Fortune shall a man forsake,
She strips him of his kingdom and success,
His friends as well, the greater and the less.
For he whose friends are friends of Fortune too,
Mishap will make them enemies, I guess;
This proverb is both widely known and true.

ZENOBIA:

Zenobia, of Palmyra was the queen,
As the Persians write, in nobleness
So worthy, and in arms so passing keen,
None could match her in courageousness,
Nor her lineage, nor her other greatness.
Of the Persian royal blood descended.
I do not say she was the loveliest,
But her beauty could not be amended.

From her childhood, I find she fled
The offices of women, to nature went,
And many a wild hart's blood she shed
With swift arrows that through them she sent;
She was so fleet of foot they soon were spent.
And when she grew older she would kill
Lions, leopards, bears, so all were rent,
And in her arms contain them there at will.

She dared the wild creatures' dens to seek,
And ran about the mountains in the night,
And slept beneath a bush; and nothing meek
Would wrestle by main force and main might
With any man, however strong in fight;
None to withstand her arms could be found.
She kept her maidenhead, her honour bright,
Nor deigned that she by any man be bound.

But at last her friends all saw her married
To Odenathus, prince of that country,
Albeit that she had for so long tarried.
For you must understand now that he
Had the same inclinations as had she.
And yet when they were knit together,
They lived in joy and in felicity,
For each loved, and each held dear, the other.

Save one thing; she never would assent
At any time that he might with her lie
Except but once, for it was her intent
To have a child, the race to multiply.
And so as soon as she did espy
That she was not with child by the deed,
She suffered him once more, by and by,
But only once, and then no more, indeed.

And if she was with child at the last,
No longer would she let him play the game
Till the full forty weeks were past;
Then once more did she allow the same.
And Odenathus, be he wild or tame,
He got no more of her, for thus she said:
It was for wives mere lechery, and shame
If men for other reasons with them played.

Two sons by Odenathus thus had she,
Whom she raised in virtue and the law.
But now unto our tale again turn we:
I say so worshipful a creature,
And wise therewith, and keeping measure,
So zealous in the wars, and courteous too,
None could more labour in the wars endure,
Though men indeed should seek the whole world through.

Her richness of display cannot be told,
Whether in treasure or in her clothing;
She was all clad in jewellery and gold.
And she neglected naught, for her hunting,
Having in sundry tongues great learning,
When she had leisure; and she did intend
To study books deeply, as was her liking,
And learn how in true virtue life to spend.

And briefly of this story to relate,
So brave was her husband and was she,
That they conquered many kingdoms great
In the Orient, many a fair city
Appertaining unto the majesty
Of Rome, and with strong hand held them fast.
And never might their foes make them flee
While King Odenathus' days did last.

As for her battles, if of them you'd read,
Against Shapur the King, who was her foe,
And others too, and all that passed indeed,
How she conquered, what title had, and so
Afterwards of her trouble and her woe,
How she was besieged through her mistake –
Then you shall to my master Petrarch go,
Who wrote the most of it, I'll undertake.

When Odenathus died, she mightily
Held all his kingdoms in her own hand
Against her foes she fought so cruelly
There was no prince or king in all that land
That was not glad if he should understand
That she'd not treat him as an enemy.
With her they made alliance, and did stand
In peace with her and quiet, and let her be.

The Emperor, one Claudius Gothicus,
And before him Gallienus, the Roman,
Were never in their reign so courageous,
Nor the Armenian, nor the Egyptian,
Nor the Arabian, nor the Syrian,
To dare to take the field with her and fight
Lest she should slay them by her own hand,
Or with her army put them all to flight.

In royal robes her sons were wont to go,
Both heirs to their father's kingdoms all,
Herennianus, Timolaus, so
Were they named, the Persians thus did them call.
But Fortune with her honey mixes gall:
This mighty queen's power could not endure.
Fortune from her kingdom saw her fall,
Into wretchedness, through misadventure.

Aurelian, when that the governance
Of Rome fell into his hands, I say,
He set himself on her to wreak vengeance,
And with his legions he made his way
Towards Zenobia; and on a day
He made her flee, and as was his intent,
Took and fettered her, and her children they
Were taken too, and home to Rome he went.

Amongst the other trophies that he won,
Her chariot all of gold, her jewellery,
This great Roman, this Aurelian,
Brought back with him, for all the world to see.
The vanguard of his Triumph there walked she,
With golden chains about her neck hanging;
Crowned she was, according to degree,
And full of gems was charged her clothing.

Alas, Fortune! She that but lately was
The terror of high kings and emperors,
All the people gazed on her, alas!
And she that was all helmeted in the wars,
And by force won strong towns and towers,
Shall on her head now wear a veil light;
And she that bore a sceptre wreathed with flowers,
Shall bear a distaff, thus her costs requite.

KING PEDRO THE FIRST OF SPAIN:

O noble, O worthy Pedro, glory of Spain,
Whom Fortune held in such high majesty,
Of your piteous death should men complain!
Out of your land your brother made you flee;
And afterwards, through siege and subtlety
You were betrayed and led unto his tent.
Where with his own hand he slew thee,
Succeeding to your kingdom and your rent.

The silver field with eagle black therein,
Caught with a limed rod, stained red, indeed,
He brewed this wickedness and all this sin!
Mauny, the 'evil nest', he worked this deed –
No Oliver, to Charlemagne, who took heed
Of truth and honour, but from Armorica
A Ganelon, corrupted by his greed,
He brought this worthy king to disaster.

KING PETER OF CYPRUS:

O worthy Peter, King of Cyprus, also,
Who won Alexandria by high mastery,
On full many a heathen you wrought woe,
At which your own liegemen felt great envy,
And for no other cause but your chivalry
They in your bed slew you on the morrow.
So does Fortune guide her wheel, you see,
And out of joy brings men to sorrow.

BERNARBÒ VISCONTI OF LOMBARDY:

Of Milan great Bernarbò Visconti,
God of delight, and scourge of Lombardy,
Why should I not of your misfortune speak,
Since in estate you climbed so highly?
Your brother's son, doubly bound to thee,
For he your nephew was and son-in-law,
Within his prison slew you in misery.
But of why, or how, I know no more.

UGOLINO COUNT OF PISA:

What Ugolino of Pisa did endure
No tongue may tell of it for pity.
A little outside Pisa stands a tower,
In which tower imprisoned once was he,
And with him his little children three;
The eldest scarcely five years was in age.
Alas, Fortune! It was great cruelty
To lock up birds like this in such a cage!

Condemned he was to die in that prison,
For Ruggieri, Pisa's Bishop, lies
Told, false charges made at his suggestion,
Through which the people did up-rise,
And cast him in prison, in such wise
As you have heard; and meat and drink he had
So little, that it might scarcely suffice,
And it was also poor in kind and bad.

And on a day it befell, in that hour
When that his meat was wont to be brought,
The gaoler shut the doors of the tower.
He heard it right enough, but he spoke naught,
And to his mind there came anon a thought,
That they from hunger would let him die.
'Alas!' quoth he, 'alas that I was wrought!'
And at that the tear fell from his eye.

His young son, that was three years of age,
Unto him: 'Father,' said, 'why do you weep?
When will the gaoler bring our pottage?
Is there a morsel of that bread you keep?
I am so hungry that I cannot sleep.
Now would God that I might sleep forever!
Then would no hunger through my stomach creep;
There is naught but bread shall aid me ever.'

Thus day after day the child did cry,
Till in his father's lap adown he lay,
And said: 'Farewell, father, I must die!'
Kissed his father, and died that very day.
And when the woeful father saw this, pray,
For woe he started his two arms to bite,
And said: 'Alas, Fortune, and well-away!
False wheel, for my woe, I blame you outright.'

His children thought from hunger thus it was
That he his arms gnawed, and not from woe,
And said: 'Dear father, do not so, alas,
But rather eat the flesh that on us grows.
Our flesh you gave us, take the flesh we owe,
And eat your fill.' – Right thus they to him said.
And after that, within a day or so,
They lay in his lap and they were dead.

He himself despairs, from hunger starved.
Thus this mighty Earl of Pisa dies!
From high estate Fortune has him carved.
Of tragedy these words should now suffice;
Who desires it in a longer wise,
May read the great poet of Italy
Dante, that is, for he did it devise
Point by point; and every word there see.

NERO:

Although this Nero was as vicious
As any fiend that is beneath the ground,
Yet he, as so says Suetonius,
Had in subjection this great world, all found,
From East to West, South to North around.
With rubies, sapphires and with pearls pure white
Were all his clothes embroidered up and down,
For in gemstones he did greatly delight.

More delicate, more pompous in display,
More proud was never Emperor than he.
The same clothes that he had worn a day,
After that time he never more must see.
Nets of gold thread had he in great plenty,
To fish the Tiber when he wished to play.
His desires were all made law by decree,
For Fortune as his friend did him obey.

He burnt Rome for his own pleasure, ay,
The Senators he slew upon a day,
To hear how those men would weep and cry,
Slew his brother, and by his sister lay.
Of his mother made piteous display,
For he cut up her womb, to behold
Where he was conceived; oh, well-away,
In such disdain did he his mother hold.

No tears fell from his eyes at the sight
He only said: 'A fair woman was she!'
A wonder is it how he could or might
Be the judge concerning her dead beauty.
The wine to be brought commanded he,
And drank anon; no other grief displayed.
When great power is joined to cruelty,
Alas, too deep in venom men must wade!

In youth a teacher had this Emperor,
To teach him literature and courtesy,
For of morality he was the flower
At that time, unless the books deceive,
And while this teacher had the mastery,
He made him so learned and so supple
That it was long before his tyranny
Or any vice did mind from heart uncouple.

This Seneca, of whom I now advise,
Because Nero held him in such dread,
Since for vice he would him thus chastise,
Privately, not by word but deed, I've read –
'Sire,' would he say, 'an Emperor instead
Should love virtue and loath tyranny –
For which in a bath Seneca lay and bled
From both his arms, till his life did flee.

This Nero had acquired a habit once;
In youth against his master so to rise,
That afterward with him became a grievance;
Therefore he made him die in this wise.
But nonetheless this Seneca the wise
Chose in a bath to die in this manner,
Rather than face death in some other guise.
And thus did Nero slay his master dear.

Now it befell, that Fortune wished no longer
To cherish Nero in his soaring pride,
For, though he was strong, she was stronger.
She thought thus: 'By God, how ill advised
To raise a man so filled with every vice
To high degree and Emperor him call!
By God, I'll pull him down in a trice;
When he least expects it, then he'll fall.'

The people rose upon him in the night
Against his wickedness, when this he spied,
Out of his doors anon he rushed in flight
Alone, and there he though he'd find allied
Old friends, knocked hard, but the more he sped
The swifter they shut the doors and all.
Then he knew he had himself misled,
And went his way; no longer dare he call.

The people cried and muttered up and down,
So that it reached his ears how they said:
'Where's the tyrant false, Nero the clown?'
For fear indeed he almost lost his head,
And to his gods piteously he prayed
For succour but none was there beside.
In dread of all, he thought that he was dead,
And ran into a garden him to hide.

And in the garden two churls on that day
Were sitting by a fire, great and red,
And these two churls he began to pray
To slay him, by striking off his head,
And guard his body, when that he was dead,
From mutilation, and from acts of shame.
Himself he slew, last remedy, instead;
At which Fortune laughed, as if in game.

HOLOFERNES:

There was never general to a king
That held more kingdoms in subjection,
None stronger in the field in everything
In his time, or higher in distinction,
Nor more vainglorious in his presumption
Than Holofernes, whom Fortune had kissed
So amorously, and led him up and down,
Till that his head was off, before he list.

Not only did the world hold him in awe
For fear of losing wealth and liberty,
But he made every man abjure God's law.
'Nebuchadnezzar is your god', said he;
'No other god shall there worshipped be.'
Against his order no man dare trespass,
Save in Bethulia, a powerful city,
Where Eliachim, the high priest was.

But take note of the death of Holofernes:
Amidst his host he lies there drunk one night,
In his tent, like a barn, to sleep he turns;
And yet, for all his pomp and all his might,
Judith, a woman, as he lay upright
Sleeping, his head smote off, and from his tent
Full secretly she stole, ere morning light,
And with his head off to her home she went.

KING ANTIOCHUS THE ILLUSTRIOUS:

What need to tell of King Antiochus,
Or to describe his royal majesty,
His high pride, his deeds so venomous?
There was not such another one as he.
Read what is said of him in *Maccabee*,
And read the proud words that he said,
And why he fell from high prosperity,
And on a hillside wretchedly lay dead.

Fortune had advanced him so in pride
That truly he thought he might attain
Unto the stars, upon every side,
And weigh in the balance every mountain,
And all the waves of the sea restrain.
And God's people held he most in hate;
Them would he slay in torment and in pain,
Thinking that God would not his pride abate.

And because Nicanor and Timothy
Had by the Jews been conquered easily,
For those same Jews such hatred showed he
That he bade his chariot readied swiftly,
And swore an oath, and said wrathfully
That Jerusalem would dance to his tune,
And he'd wreak vengeance on it cruelly –
But of his purpose he was foiled full soon.

God for his threats smote him and so sore
With an invisible wound, incurable,
That in his guts it carved so, and did gnaw,
That his pain proved insupportable.
And that was a vengeance all rational,
For many a man's guts he rent in pain.
Yet from his purpose cursed and damnable,
For all his hurt, could not himself restrain.

But gave the word to summon all his host,
And swiftly, ere he was of it aware,
God dented all his pride and all his boast;
For he fell sorely from his chariot there,
So that his limbs and skin began to tear,
And he might no longer walk or ride,
But men bore him about in a chair
All bruised severely, both back and side.

God's vengeance smote him so cruelly
That through his body evil worms crept,
And therewithal he stank so terribly
That none of all his company that kept
By him then, whether he woke or slept,
Could the very stink of him endure.
In this troubling he wailed and wept,
And knew God the lord of every creature.

To all his host, and to himself also,
Full loathsome was the stink of his frame;
No man could bear to carry him to and fro.
And gripped by this stench and deadly pain
He starved full wretchedly, on a mountain.
Thus had this robber and this homicide,
Who made many men weep and complain,
The reward that is earned by excess pride.

ALEXANDER:

Alexander's story is so well known
That all who reach the age of discretion
Have heard some or all of his fortune.
This wide world, indeed, in conclusion,
He'd won by strength, or by his high renown,
Men sued for peace and to him did send.
The pride of man and beast he brought down,
Wherever he went, unto the world's end.

And comparison might no man make
Between him and any other conqueror;
For all this world for dread of him did quake.
Of knighthood and freedom he was the flower;
Fortune made him heir to all her honour.
Save wine and women, nothing might assuage
His high intent on warfare and its labour,
So filled was he with a lion's courage.

What praise were it to him then, if I told
Of Darius, and a hundred thousand foes,
Of kings, princes, dukes, and earls bold,
How he conquered them, and swelled their woes?
I say, as far as men may ride or go,
The world was his; what more can I advise?
For though I wrote and wandered, to and fro,
About his chivalry, it would not suffice.

Twelve years he reigned, as says *Maccabee*;
And Philip's son, of Macedon, was he,
The first who was king in Greece's country.
O worthy noble Alexander, alas,
That you should ever come to such a pass!
Poisoned were you by your folk I fear.
Fortune your *sixes aces* made, at last,
And yet for you she wept never a tear.

Who shall give me tears to complain
Of the death of nobility's franchise,
Who counted all the world as his domain,
And yet considered it could not suffice,
So full was his mind of high enterprise?
Alas, who shall help me to indict
False Fortune, and poison to despise?
– Of whose blame for all this woe I write.

JULIUS CAESAR:

By wisdom, manliness, and great labour,
From humble bed to royal majesty
Up rose Julius the Conqueror,
Who won the Occident by land and sea,
By strength of hand, or else by treaty,
And unto Rome made them tributary;
And then of Rome the Emperor was he,
Till Fortune rose as his adversary.

O mighty Caesar, who in Thessaly
Fought against Pompey, your son-in-law,
Who of the Orient ruled the chivalry
As far as the dawn of day and more,
Through your power they their death's day saw,
Save a few folk that with Pompey fled,
And thus of you the Orient stood in awe;
Thank Fortune that stood you in such stead!

But for a little while let me bewail
That Pompey, that noble governor
Of Rome, who in this war did fail.
I say, one of his men, a false traitor,
Smote off his head, to win great favour
From Julius, and him the head he brought.
Alas, Pompey, of the Orient conqueror,
That Fortune to such an end you brought!

To Rome again returned our Julius
In triumph crowned with laurel for to be.
But one day, Brutus and Cassius,
Who ever showed for his estate envy,
Brought to fruition their conspiracy
Against this Julius in subtle wise,
And chose the very place where die must he
Beneath their daggers, as I shall advise.

Thus Julius to the Capitol went
One day, where he was wont to go,
In the Capitol they seized him then,
That false Brutus and his other foes,
And struck him with their daggers so
That he had many a wound, there he did lie,
But groaned he at no stroke but one, I know,
Or else at two, unless the stories lie.

So manly was this Julius at heart,
And so in love with honest dignity,
That though his wounds gave him sore smart,
His mantle about his hips cast he,
That no man should steal his privacy.
And as he lay dying in a trance,
And knew that in truth dead was he,
Of dignity he still kept remembrance.

In Lucan this tale I recommend,
And Suetonius, Valerius also,
Who this story wrote from end to end,
How that to these great conquerors so
Fortune was first friend, and then their foe.
We may not trust in her great favour long,
But watch her with suspicion as we go;
Witness all these conquerors so strong.

CROESUS:

This rich Croesus, king of Lydia,
Croesus whom Cyrus held in dread,
Was captured still, midst of all his pride there,
And to be burnt men to the fire him led;
But such a rain down from the heavens shed
The fire was doused, and he made his escape.
But to beware it no thought had he had,
Till Fortune on the gallows made him gape.

When he escaped, he was still intent
On starting on another war again.
He believed that fortune had it sent,
The manner in which he escaped by rain,
And that by his foes he might not be slain;
And then with a dream one night he met,
Of which he was so proud and so vain
That on vengeance all his heart he set.

Upon a tree he perched, or so he thought,
Where Jupiter bathed him, back and side,
While Phoebus a fair towel then him brought
To dry him with, and so increased his pride.
And so his daughter, who stood beside,
Whom he knew with wisdom did abound,
He bade her tell him what it signified,
And she his dream began thus to expound:

'The tree,' she said the gallows-tree does mean,
And Jupiter betokens snow and rain,
And Phoebus, with his towel so clean,
There as the sun beams, that is plain.
You shall be hanged father: I say again
Rain shall wash you, and the sun shall dry.'
Thus she warned him fully, but in vain:
His daughter, she was Phanya, say I.

Hanged was Croesus then, the proud king;
His royal sceptre was of no avail.
Tragedy no other manner of thing
Can in its singing cry for or bewail
Than how Fortune always shall assail
With sudden stroke the kingdom of the proud;
For when men trust in her then she shall fail,
And cover her bright features with a cloud……..

Here the Knight halts the Monk's Tale

THE NUN'S PRIEST'S PROLOGUE

THE PROLOGUE OF THE NUN'S PRIEST'S TALE

' o!' quoth the Knight, 'good sire, no more of this!
What you said is right enough, true it is
And more, since a little grief and sadness
Is due most folk, that's right enough I guess.
As for myself, it's great distress to me
When men have been in great wealth and ease,
To hear then of their sudden fall, alas!
And the contrary is joy and great solace,
When a man that has been of poor estate,
Climbs up above and proves so fortunate
That he abides there in prosperity.
Such a thing is cheerful, it seems to me,
And of such things it is good news to tell.'
'Yea,' quoth our Host, 'by Saint Paul's bell,
You speak the truth! This Monk, he cries aloud
Of how Dame Fortune covered with a cloud
I know not what, and speaks of tragedy –
As you have heard; yet, faith, no remedy
Is it to bewail these things or complain
When they are done, and also it brings pain,
As you have said, to hear of heaviness.
Sir Monk, no more of it, may God you bless!
You tale annoys all this good company.
That sort of talk is scarcely worth a flea,
There's no amusement in it, and no game.
Wherefore, Sir Monk, Sir Piers by your name,
I pray you heartily, tell of something else;

Were it not for the clinking of the bells,
That from your bridle hang on every side,
By Heaven's King, that for us all died,
I should ere this have tumbled down in sleep,
Though the slough below were ever so deep.
Then would your tale have been told in vain!
For certainly, as the clerks make plain,
Whenever a man lacks an audience,
No use his uttering a single sentence.
And well I know, the capacity is in me,
As to whether anything well told shall be.
Sire, say something of hunting, I you pray.'
'Nay,' quoth the Monk, 'I have no wish to play.
Now, let another speak, my tale is told.'
  Then spoke our Host with rude speech and bold,
And said unto the Nun's Priest anon:
'Come near, good priest; come hither, now Sir John!
Tell us such things as make the heart glad.
Be blithe now, though you ride upon a nag!
What though your horse be miserable and lean?
If he will serve, why should you care a bean!
See that your heart is ever merry, though.'
  'Yea, sire,' quoth he,' yea, Host, and I will so,
Not to be merry now would bring me blame.'
And right anon now he took up the game.
And thus he spoke unto us everyone,
This sweet Priest, this goodly man, Sir John.

The Nun's Priest's Tale

Here begins the Nun's Priest's Tale of the cock and hen, Chanticleer and Pertelote

poor widow, somewhat bent with age,
Lived, long ago, in a little cottage,
Beside a grove, standing in a dale.
The widow of whom I tell this tale,
Since the day when she was last a wife,
Led, patiently, a very simple life,
For little was her property or rent.
By husbandry, such as God her sent,
She kept herself, and two daughters poor.
Three large sows had she, of swine no more,
Three cows, and a sheep, as well, called Molly.
Full sooty was her bower, all melancholy,
In which she ate full many a scanty meal.
No pungent sauce was needed for her veal;
No dainty morsel ever passed her throat.
Her diet, her cottage struck a single note.
Repletion thus had never made her sick;
And a moderate diet was all her physic,
And exercise, and the heart's abundance.
The gout no reason gave her not to dance,
No apoplexy smote her in the head.
No wine drank she, neither white nor red.
Her board was mostly of the white and black –
Milk and brown bread, of which she had no lack,
Grilled bacon, and an egg or two, I say,
For she was, as it were, a dairy maid.

A yard she had, enclosed all about
With palings, and a dry ditch without,
In which there roamed a cock called Chanticleer.
In all the land, at crowing he'd no peer;
His voice was merrier than the merry organ
On Mass days in the chapel there, piping on.
Truer was his crowing in the lodge
Than is a clock or abbey horologe.
By nature he knew the right ascension
Of the celestial equator, I'll mention:
For each fifteen degrees of its ascending,
He would crow, as needed no amending.
His comb redder than the finest coral,
Was crenellated like the castle wall.
His bill was black, and as the jet it shone;
Like azure were his legs and toes, as one;
His claws were whiter than the lily flower,
And like the burnished gold all his colour.
This noble cock had in his governance
Seven hens, his pleasure to advance,
Who were his sisters and his paramours,
And wonderfully like him, as to colours;
Of which the fairest, tinted round her throat,
Was called the lovely lady Pertelote.
Courteous she was, discreet and debonair,
Companionable, and bore herself so fair
From the day that she was seven nights old,
That truly the heart she held in her hold
Of Chanticleer, locked in her every limb.
He loved her so that all was well with him.
And such a joy was it to hear them sing
When that the bright sun began to spring,
In sweet accord, 'My love's in foreign land'.
– For at that time, I'm given to understand,
Beasts and birds as well could speak and sing.
And it so befell, that in the early dawning,
As Chanticleer among his wives all

Sat on his perch, lodged within the hall,
And next to him sat the fair Pertelote,
Chanticleer began moaning in his throat,
Like a man who in a dream is troubled sore.
And when Pertelote thus heard him roar,
She was aghast, and said, 'My heart, dear,
What ails you, to moan as you do here?
Fie, what a sleeper! What a noise, for shame!'
And he answered her, saying thus: 'Dear dame,
I pray you not to take my noise amiss.
By God, I thought I was in such mischief
Just now, my heart is pounding yet with fright!
Now God', quoth he, 'read my dream aright,
And keep my body from foul prison now!
I dreamed that I wandered up and down
Within our yard, and saw a kind of beast
Shaped like a hound, that would have seized
My body, and I seemed as good as dead.
His colour was betwixt yellow and red,
And tipped was his tail, and both his ears,
With black, unlike the rest of all his hairs.
His snout was small, and he was fiery eyed.
– Of his mere looks alone I almost died!
And this caused all my moaning, doubtless.'
'For shame!' quoth she, 'fie on timorousness!
Alas!' quoth she, 'for, by the Lord above,
Now have you lost my heart and all my love!
I cannot love a coward, by my faith!
For certainly, whatever women say,
They all desire, if it might truly be,
A husband who is brave, and wise and free,
Discreet as well, no miser, and no fool,
Nor one aghast at every warlike tool,
Nor yet a boaster, by our Lord above!
How dare you say for shame, to your love,
That anything at all makes you a-feared?
Where is your man's heart to match your beard?

Alas, and are you aghast at dreaming?
God knows, dreams are vanity or nothing.
Dreams are engendered by indigestion,
And bodily exhalations and their action,
And excessive humours dreams excite.
For sure, this dream that you met with tonight
Comes from the greater superfluity
Of your red choler, as it seems to me,
Which causes folks to be in dread, in dreams.
Of arrows, and the fire's reddening gleams,
Of red beasts also, lest they seek to bite,
Of warfare, and whelps both fierce and slight
– Just as the humour of melancholy
Causes full many a man to cry in sleep
For fear of black bears, or bulls black,
Or else black devils clinging to his back.
Of other humours I could tell also,
That work a man in sleep many a woe,
But I'll pass on as lightly as I can.
  Lo, Cato was ever so wise a man,
Did he not say: "Take no account of dreams"?
Now sire,' quoth she, 'when we flee our beam,
For God's love, go take a laxative!
On peril of my soul, long days to live,
That's the best counsel, and no deceit,
To purge both choler and melancholy;
And lest you find an excuse to tarry,
Because the town has no apothecary,
I myself the right herbs will show you
That bring both health to us and profit too.
And in our own yard these herbs I'll find,
Which in their properties are of the kind
To purge below, and do the same above.
Don't neglect them now, for God's own love!
You are quite choleric in complexion;
Beware lest the sun in his ascension
Find you all replete with humours hot!

And if he does, I'll bet a groat it's not
Long before you've a fever, a tertian,
Or an ague that may prove your bane.
A day or two you'll need digestives
Of worms, before you take your laxatives,
Of laurel, centaury, and fumitory,
Or else hellebore that grows so freely,
Of caper-spurge or the blackthorn berry,
Or plantain, growing in our yard, so merry.
Peck them as they grow, and take them in!
Be merry, husband, by your father's kin!
Fear you no dream – What I can say more?'
'Madame' quoth he, '*graunt merci* for your lore!
But nonetheless, regarding Cato now,
Who for his wisdom won such great renown,
Though he bade us hold no dream in dread,
By God! Men have in old books often read
In many a text of more authority
Than ever Cato's had, God prosper me,
The very reverse of all Cato's sense
And have found in their experience
That dreams to us are significations
Both of the joys and the tribulations
That folk suffer in this life at present.
There is no need for any argument;
The proof itself is shown by the deed.
One of the greatest authors that men read,
Cicero, says thus: two friends once went
On pilgrimage, with serious intent;
And it so chanced, they came to a town
Where they such a congregation found
Of people, and so many folk in passage,
That there was not so much as a cottage
In which they might both lodge for a fee.
So that they had, out of necessity
For that one night, to part company;
And each of them went to a hostelry,

And found a lodging as it might befall,
So one of them was lodged in a stall,
Far off, in a yard, with oxen used to plough;
The other man was lodged well, I vow,
As chance favoured him, or else Fortune,
She that governs all of us in common.
  And it befell that, long ere it was day,
The latter dreamed, in bed there as he lay,
That his friend began for him to call,
Crying: "Alas! Here in an ox's stall,
This night, I shall be murdered where I lie!
Now help me, dearest brother, or I die!
Come to me, and in all haste," he cried.
The man from his sleep in fear did rise;
But once he'd woken, and banished sleep,
He took a turn, and thought the thing would keep,
And that his dream was merely fantasy.
So twice in his sleep thus dreamed he,
And yet a third time came his friend again
As he thought, and said, "Now I am slain.
Behold my blood-stained wounds deep and wide!
Rise early and in the morning-tide
At the west gate of the town", quoth he,
"A cart full of dung there you shall see,
In which my corpse was hidden secretly.
Have the carter then arrested boldly.
My gold caused my murder: truth I say."
– And every detail of his death he gave,
With a full piteous face, pale of hue.
And trust me, next day the dream proved true;
For on the morrow, soon as it was day,
The man to his friend's inn made his way.
And when he came to the ox's stall,
For his friend he began to call.
  The innkeeper answered him anon,
Saying: "Sire, your friend is long gone.
As soon as daylight came, he went from town."

This the man's suspicion did arouse,
Remembering the dreams he encountered;
And forth he went – he would wait no longer –
To the west gate of the town, where he found
A dung cart, off to fertilise the ground,
That was in all particulars that arise
The same he heard the murdered man advise.
And he began to cry, courageously,
On vengeance, justice for the felony:
"My friend indeed was murdered this same night,
And in this cart he lies gaping upright!
I call upon the officers", quoth he,
"Charged to protect and keep this city!
Murder! Alas, here lies my friend, I'll state!"
What more of this tale should I relate?
Folk ran to tip the load out on the ground,
And in the middle of the dung they found
The dead man, his murder shown anew.
O blissful God, who are so just and true,
Lo, how always murder you betray!
Murder will out, we say day after day.
Murder is so foul and abominable
To God, who is so just and reasonable,
That he will not allow it long concealed,
Though hidden for a year, or two, or three.
Murder will out: that is my conclusion.
And right anon, the officers of that town
Seized the carter, and they racked him so,
And then the innkeeper they racked also,
That they confessed their wickedness anon,
And were hanged high by the neck bone.
Thus dreams may prove serious indeed.
And certainly in the same book I read,
Right in the next chapter after this
– I tell no lie, and so may I find bliss –
Of two men who wished to pass the sea,
For certain reasons, into a far country,

If the wind had not proved contrary,
And made them tarry there in the city,
That stood full merry on the haven side.
But at last, towards the evening-tide,
The wind began to blow from the west.
Jolly and glad they went to their rest,
And vowed that in the dawn they'd set sail.
  But hearken to my marvellous tale.
One of them, as deep in sleep he lay,
Had a wondrous dream, towards day
He thought a man stood by his bed-side,
And commanded that he should abide,
Saying; "If you should sail, as you intend,
You will be drowned; my tale is at an end."
  He woke, and told his friend straight away,
And begged him the voyage to delay;
And for that day, he begged him to abide.
His friend, indeed, who lay by his bed-side,
Began to laugh, and jeer at him full fast.
"No dream," quoth he, "may make my heart aghast.
I'll not delay my plans for anything!
I give never a straw for all your dreaming,
For dreams are but vain things, and mere japes.
Men dream every day of owls or apes
And of many a fantasy withal.
Men dream of things that never are at all.
But since I see you're settled to abide,
And thus wilfully forsake the tide,
God knows, I'm sorry; yet, enjoy your day!"
– And thus he took his leave, and went his way.
But ere that he had half the voyage sailed,
I know not why, or what mischance assailed,
By some chance the ship's planks were rent,
And ship and man beneath the water went,
In sight of other ships close alongside,
That had sailed with them on that same tide.
  And therefore, fair Pertelote, my dear,

From these old examples, it does appear
That no man should show himself careless
Regarding dreams, for I say, doubtless,
Many a dream proves serious indeed.
  Lo, in the life of Saint Kenelm I read,
Son of Kenulphus, once the noble king
Of Mercia, how Kenelm dreamed a thing,
Shortly ere he was murdered, on a day,
His murder in a vision saw, I say.
His nurse, she expounded, so they tell,
His dream, and bade him guard him well
From treason; yet he, but seven years old,
Took little notice of the dream he told,
So innocent and holy was his heart.
By God, I'd give my shirt, for a start,
If you'd read of his legend, like to me!
  Dame Pertelote, I tell you truly,
Macrobius, who writes of a vision
Of Scipio's in Africa, his opinion,
As he affirms, is that dreams may be
Warnings of things that later men may see.
And furthermore, I pray you, look you well
In the Old Testament, at Daniel,
And whether he thought dreams mere fantasy.
Read of Joseph too, and there you shall see
That dreams are sometimes – though not all –
Warnings of things that later do befall.
Look, too, at Egypt's King, at Pharaoh,
At his baker and his butler also,
As to the consequences of their dreams!
Whoever meditates on ancient themes
May find of dreams many a wondrous thing.
  Lo, Croesus, who was of Lydia king,
Did he not dream he sat upon a tree,
Which signified that hanged he should be?
Lo, there is Andromache, Hector's wife,
The day that Hector would lose his life,

She dreamed the very same night before
How Hector should die and be no more
If he went that day into the battle.
She warned him, but it was of no avail;
He went off to fight nevertheless,
And was slain by Achilles, no less.
But the tale is all too long to tell,
And now it is nigh day; I may not dwell
On all of this, so say in conclusion,
That I shall have from this prevision
Adversity; and I say furthermore
By your laxatives I set no store,
For they are poison, I know full well.
I defy them; I love not their spell!
  Now let us speak of mirth, forget all this.
Madame Pertelote, thus have I bliss,
In one thing God has sent me large grace,
For when I see the beauty of your face,
You are so scarlet-red about your eye,
It quenches my fears and makes them die.
For certain it is: *In principio,*
Mulier est hominis confusio.
– Madame, the meaning of the Latin is:
"Woman is man's joy and all his bliss." –
For when I feel a-nights your soft side,
– Even though I may not take a ride,
Because our perch so narrow is, alas! –
I am so full of joy and of solace,
That I defy both vision now and dream.'
  And with that word, he flew down from the beam,
Since it was day, and also his hens all,
And with a 'chuck' began his hens to call,
For he had found seed lying in the yard.
Regal he was, no longer filled with dread;
He covered Pertelote some twenty times,
Trod her as often, ere that it was prime.
Like a grim lion he gazes all around,

And on his toes he saunters up and down;
He deigns not to set foot upon the ground.
He 'chucks' again each time a seed is found,
And to him then run his dear wives all.
Thus regal, as a prince is in his hall,
I'll leave this Chanticleer in his pasture,
And next will I tell of his adventure.
  When the month with which the world began,
Namely March, in which God first made man,
Was complete, and past again also
When March was done, thirty days and two,
Befell it, Chanticleer in all his pride,
His seven wives walking by his side,
Cast up his eyes towards the bright sun,
That into the sign of Taurus now had run
Twenty degrees and one, and somewhat more,
And knew by nature, and no other lore,
That it was prime, and crowed with blissful voice.
'The sun,' he said, 'is climbed in heavenly course,
Forty degrees and one, and more, it is.
Madame Pertelote, my world's bliss,
Hearken, these blissful brides, how they sing,
And see the fresh flowers how they spring!
Full is my heart with revel and with solace!'
  But suddenly he fell in sorrowful case;
For ever the latter end of joy is woe.
God knows that worldly joy is swift to go;
And any rhetorician who fair can write
He in a chronicle can safely that indite,
As a sovereign thing to note, indeed.
Now ever wise man, let him list to me;
This story is as true, I'll undertake,
As the book of Launcelot of the Lake,
That women hold in such great reverence.
Now will I turn again to my utterance.
  A black-tipped fox of sly iniquity,
Who in the grove had lived years three,

With premeditated scheming, at a stroke,
That same night through hedge and fences broke,
Into the yard, where Chanticleer the fair
Was wont and his wives too, to repair;
And in a bed of green-stuff still he lay
Till it was near the middle of the day,
Waiting the time for Chanticleer to fall,
As are wont to do these homicides all
That lie in wait to slay innocent men.
  O false murderer, lurking in your den!
O new Escariot, new Ganelon!
False dissimulator, O Greek Sinon,
Who brought Troy all utterly to sorrow!
O Chanticleer, accursed be the morrow
When you flew to the yard from the beam!
You were warned indeed by your dream
That this day would be perilous to thee.
– But what God foreknows must surely be,
In the opinion of certain clerics.
Ask witness of one who a true cleric is,
That in the schools has been great altercation
About this matter, and great disputation,
Wrought by a hundred thousand, every man.
But I cannot sift the flour from the bran,
As can the holy doctor Saint Augustine,
Boethius, or Bishop Bradwardine,
As to whether God's noble foreknowing
Means that I must then do a certain thing
– By 'must' I denote *simple* necessity –
Or whether free choice may be granted me
To do that same thing, or to do it not,
Though God foreknew it ere that I was wrought,
Or if his knowing constrains me not at all,
Except by necessity *conditional*.
Well, I'll have naught to do with the matter;
My tale's of a cockerel, as you may hear,
Who took his wife's counsel, but in sorrow,

To walk in the yard upon the morrow
After he'd had the dream of which I told.
Woman's counsel oft leaves us dead and cold;
Woman's counsel brought us first to woe,
And made Adam out of Paradise to go,
Where he had been merry and full of ease.
But as I know not whom it might displease
If I the counsel of women dare to blame,
Let us pass on, I speak as if in game.
Read the authors, treating of such matter,
And of women you may hear their chatter.
These are the cockerel's words and not mine;
I wish no harm to any woman divine.
  Fair in the dust, to bathe her doth lie,
Pertelote, with all her sisters by,
Out in the sun, and Chanticleer so free
Sings merrier than a mermaid in the sea
(For *Physiologus* says for a certainty
That they sing right well and merrily).
And it so befell, that as he cast his eye,
Among the green-stuff, at a butterfly,
He suddenly saw the fox lying low,
No longer had a reason then to crow,
But he cried anon, 'Cock, cock!' and up did start,
As a man does who is a-feared at heart;
For by nature a beast desires to flee
From its enemy, if one it chance to see,
Though it has never seen such with its eye.
  Now Chanticleer, when he chanced to spy
The fox, he would have fled, but fox anon
Said: 'Noble sir, alas, will you be gone?
Are you afraid of me who am your friend?
Now, surely, I'd be worse than any fiend
If I should do you harm or villainy!
I have not come to steal your privacy;
But truly, the reason for my coming
Is only to hear how well you sing.

For truly, you have as merry a voice,
As the angels who in Heaven do rejoice.
And then you have in music more feeling
Than Boethius, or any who can sing.
My lord your father – God his soul now bless! –
And also your mother, of her great kindness,
Once visited my house, to my great ease.
And you sir, certainly, I seek to please.
  For if men speak of singing, I must say
– As own the use of my two eyes I may –
Save for you, I never heard man sing
As your father did of a sweet morning.
Sure it was heart-felt, everything he sang!
And to be sure his voice full loudly rang,
He would take great pains that both his eyes
Were tight shut, so louder were his cries,
While standing on tiptoes therewithal,
And stretching out his neck long and small;
And also he was of such discretion
That there was no one in any region
Who in song or wisdom might him surpass.
I have read, in *Burnellus the Ass*,
Among its verses, how there was a cock,
Who, when a priest's son gave him a knock
On his leg when young, served him amiss,
And made him lose his sovereign benefice.
But certainly, there's no comparison
Between the wisdom and discretion
Of your good father, and such subtlety!
Now sing on, sire, for holy charity;
Let's hear: can you your father emulate?'
  Then Chanticleer his wings began to beat,
As one who could not foul treason see,
He was ravished so by such flattery.
  Alas, you lords, many a false flatterer
Lives at your court, and many a cozener,
Who pleases you better, by my faith,

Than he who truthfulness does display!
Read *Ecclesiastes* on flattery;
Beware, you lords, of all their treachery.
  Chanticleer stood up high on his toes,
Stretched out his neck, and kept his eyes closed,
And began to crow out loud for nones.
Sir Russell the fox started up at once,
And by the throat seized Chanticleer,
And on his back toward the wood, I fear,
Carried him off, and nobody pursued.
  O Destiny that may not be eschewed!
Alas, that Chanticleer flew from the beam!
Alas, that his wife ignored his dream!
– And on a Friday fell all this mischance.
  O Venus, sweet goddess of love's chance,
Since it was your servant, Chanticleer,
And in your service he spent his life dear,
More for delight than race to multiply,
Why suffer him on your own day to die?
  O Geoffrey of Vinsauf, my master sovereign,
Who, when your great King Richard was slain
By a bolt, lamented his death so sore,
Why have I not your wisdom and your lore,
To chide the day, a Friday, as did you?
– For he was slain upon a Friday too.
Then my lament I would show you plain,
For Chanticleer's fear, and for his pain.
  For sure, such cries and such lamentation
Were never made by ladies when Ilium
Was won, and Pyrrhus with his drawn sword,
Having grasped King Priam by the beard,
Slew him, as Virgil's *Aeneid* tells us,
As all those hens made in the close
When of Chanticleer they caught sight.
But above all Dame Pertelote outright
Cried louder than did Hasdrubal's wife,
When her dear husband lost his life,

And the Romans set fire to Carthage;
She was so filled with torment and rage
That willingly into the flames she leapt,
Steadfast of heart, her tryst with death she kept.
  O woeful hens, you cried as loudly
As, when Nero set fire to the city
Of Rome, cried all the senator's wives,
Because their husbands had lost their lives;
In their innocence Nero had them slain.
Now will I turn to my tale again.
  The poor widow, her daughters also,
Heard the hens cry and all their woe,
And out of the house they ran anon,
And saw the fox towards the grove had gone,
And on his back carried the cock away,
And shouted out: 'Thief!' and 'Well-away!
It is the fox!' – And after him they ran,
And with staves many another man.
Ran Coll our dog, and Talbot and Gerland,
And Malkin with a distaff in her hand;
Ran cow and calf, and the very hogs,
Frightened by the barking of the dogs,
And the shouting of men and women, worst,
They ran so I thought their hearts would burst.
They yelled as the fiends do down in Hell;
The ducks quacked as though death loomed as well;
The geese for fear flew high above the trees;
Out of the hive came a swarm of bees.
So hideous was the noise – ah, *benedictitee*! –
I'm sure Jack Straw and all his company
Never uttered shouts one half so shrill,
When they wished the Flemings all to kill,
As this day rose up behind the fox.
Trumpets of brass they brought, flutes of box,
Of horn, of bone, to blow out loud and hoot,
And therewithal they shrieked and whooped;
It seemed as if the heavens themselves would fall!

Now, good men, I pray you, hearken all:
Lo, how Fortune alters suddenly
The hope and pride of their enemy!
The cock that lay upon the fox's back,
Despite his fear, spoke to the fox: 'Alack,
Sire, if I were you, as it seems to me,
I'd turn my head, and shout, God help me,
"Turn back again, you proud peasants all!
And a foul pestilence upon you fall!
Now I have reached the woodland-side,
Despite your chase, the cock shall here abide.
I'll eat him, by my faith, and that anon!"'
The fox said, 'By my faith, it shall be done!'
– And as he spoke the words, all suddenly,
The cock broke from his mouth full swiftly,
And high into a tree he flew anon.
And when the fox saw that the cock was gone,
'Alas!' quoth he, 'O Chanticleer, alas!
I have done you,' quoth he, 'a foul trespass,
Inasmuch as I rendered you a-feared,
When I seized you and then brought you here.
But sire, I did it with no harsh intent;
Come down, and I'll explain what I meant.
God help me, I'll tell you all the truth!'
'Nay, then' quoth he, 'and curses on us two!
And first I'll curse myself, both blood and bones,
If you deceive me oftener than once!
You shall no more, with your foul flattery,
Make me sing, close my eyes so foolishly;
For he that shuts his eyes when he should see,
Willingly, let him not thrive, for me!'
'Nay,' quoth the fox, 'may God give him mischance
Who is so careless of his governance,
And chatters when he should hold his peace!'
Lo, such it is to be reckless indeed,
And negligent, and trust in flattery!
But you that think this tale but a folly,

And all about a fox, and cock, and hen,
Take note of the moral, my good men.
For Saint Paul says all that written is,
For our understanding's written, as is this,
Take the grain, and leave the chaff there still.
Now, gracious God, if it should be thy will
(As said my Lord), so make us all good men,
And bring us to the heights of bliss! Amen.

Here is ended the Nun's Priest's Tale

The Epilogue to the Nun's Priest's Tale

' ir Nun's Priest,' our Host said right anon,
'Blessed be your breeches, and each stone!
That was a merry tale of Chanticleer.
But, by my troth, if you were a secular,
You would have been a treader of fowl alright;
For if you have spirit, as you have might,
Hens would be needed, is what I mean,
Yea, more than seven times seventeen!
See, what shoulders he has this gentle priest,
A solid neck and chest has there, at least!
He gazes like a sparrow hawk from those eyes;
For his complexion too he needs no dyes
Of Brazil-wood, or scarlet from Portugal.
Now sire, blessings on you for your tale!'
And after that, he, with full merry cheer,
Turned to another of us, as you'll hear.

Translator's Note: The epilogue may be by Chaucer, or a later scribe, and appears to have been reworked for the Monk's Prologue

The end of the Epilogue to the Nun's Priest's tale

THE SECOND NUN'S PROLOGUE

THE PROLOGUE OF THE SECOND NUN'S TALE

That servant and nurse unto our vices,
Which men call, in English, idleness,
The porter of the gate that men entices,
To eschew, and with its contrary oppress
– That is to say, through lawful business –
Well ought we to do, with true intent,
Lest the fiend through idleness snatch us hence.

For he, who with his thousand cords sly
Constantly waits us on the back to clap,
When a man in idleness he does spy,
Can all so easily catch him in his trap,
That till a man is caught by his coat-flap,
He's unaware the fiend has him in hand!
We ought to work, and idleness withstand.

And even if men dreaded not to die,
Yet men might know by reason, doubtless,
The idle man's a sluggard, plain to see,
And no increase comes from idleness,
And vile sloth does our lives compress
To mere sleeping, and to eat and drink,
Devouring all that others do and think.

And so to drive from us all idleness
That is the cause of such great confusion,
I have here wrought, through honest business,
After the legend, in my own translation,
Right of your glorious life and passion –
You with the crown twined of rose and lily all,
You I mean maid and martyr, Saint Cecilia.

And you, who are the flower of virgins all,
Of whom Saint Bernard loves so to indite,
On you too, thus beginning, first I call;
You comfort of us wretches, help me cite
Your maiden's death, who won through merit bright
Eternal life and, from the demon, victory,
As men may read, by following her story.

You maid and mother, daughter of your son,
You well of mercy, sinful souls' cure,
In whom God chose to dwell, being one
Humblest yet highest over every creature,
You who thus ennobled so our nature
That He did not disdain, who made mankind,
His son in flesh and blood to clothe and wind.

Within the blissful cloister of your sides
Eternal Love took on man's shape, that Peace
Who of the Three Worlds lord and guide is,
Whom earth, sea, and heaven, without cease,
Ever worship: and you, virgin stainless,
Bore of your body, and yet still maiden pure,
This Creator of every creature.

Assembled, in you, is magnificence
Mercy and goodness, with such pity
That you, who are the sun of excellence,
Not only help those who pray to thee,
But oftentimes, in your benignity,
Full freely, before men your help beseech,
You go before them, and are their life's leech.

Now help me, meek and blissful fair maid,
A wretch in exile in this desert of gall!
Think of the Canaanite woman who said
That whelps may eat some of the crumbs all
From their master's table that do fall.
And though an unworthy scion I, of Eve,
And sinful, accept my faith, for I believe.

And, since faith is dead without works,
That I may work, grant me wit and space,
So I am quit of what in darkness lurks.
Be my advocate in that high place
Where without end is sung 'Hosanna',
You, Christ's mother, daughter of Saint Anna.

And my soul in prison illuminate,
That burdened is by the contagion
Of my body, and also by the weight
Of earthly lust and false affection.
O haven of refuge, O salvation
Of those who are in sorrow and distress,
Now help me my labour to address.

Yet I pray you, who read what I write,
Forgive me my lack of diligence,
Failing this story subtly to indite;
For I have taken all the words and sense,
From one who in holy reverence
Wrote the saint's story and her legend,
And I pray you will my work amend.

First I would the name of Saint Cecilia
Expound, as men may in her story read.
In English thus it means 'Heaven's lily',
That is, pure chasteness of virginity;
Or, from the whiteness of her purity,
And green of conscience, and her good name
The sweet savour, 'lily' denotes the same.

Or Cecilia means 'path for the blind',
For she was an example, for our teaching.
Or else Cecilia, as I written find
Is made by a manner of conjoining
From 'Heaven' and 'Leah'; so figuring
'Heaven' is there for thoughts of holiness,
And 'Leah' for her constant usefulness.

Cecilia may be formed too in this manner:
'Lacking in blindness', for her great light
Of sapience, and for her morals clear.
Or else, lo, comes this maiden's name bright
From 'Heaven' and Greek '*laos*', so might
Men her truly the 'people's heaven' call,
An example of good and wise works all.

For '*laos*' read 'people' I mean to say,
And just as men may in the heavens see
The sun and moon and stars every way,
So men, spiritually, in this maid free
Find of faith the magnanimity,
And the clearness whole of sapience,
And sundry works bright in excellence.

And just as the philosophers do write
That heaven is swift, and round too, and burning,
So was fair Cecilia the white
Full swift and busy, ever the good working,
Rounded and whole in her persevering,
And burning ever in charity full bright.
Now have I told you all her name aright.

THE SECOND NUN'S TALE

HERE BEGINS THE SECOND NUN'S TALE OF THE LIFE OF SAINT CECILIA

his maiden bright, Cecilia, as her life says,
Was of Roman stock, and of noble kind;
And from her cradle fostered in the faith
Of Christ, and bore His gospel in her mind.
She never ceased, as it is writ I find,
To pray, and her true God to love and dread,
Beseeching Him to guard her maidenhead.

And when this maid was given to a man
In wedlock, who was full young in age,
One who bore the name Valerian,
And the day was come for her marriage,
She, all devout and humble, in her courage,
Under her robe of gold that was full fair,
Had next her flesh a garment all of hair.

And while the church organ made melody,
Thus to God alone in her heart sang she:
'O Lord, my soul and my body keep
Undefiled, lest I confounded be!'
And for His love that died upon a tree,
Every second and third day did she fast,
Saying her prayers while the day did last.

Night came, and to bed must she be gone,
With her husband, as is oft the manner;
And privately she said to him anon:
'O sweet and well beloved spouse, my dear,
There is a thing, if you will only hear,
That to you I would dearly love to say,
If you will swear never this to betray.'

Valerian solemnly to her did swear
That at no time, whatever it might be,
Would he ever, wantonly, betray her.
And then at first to him thus said she:
'I have an angel then, one that loves me,
Who with great love, whether I wake or sleep,
Is always there my body for to keep.

And if he were to know, now take heed,
That you touched me in love or shamefully,
He right anon would take you in the deed,
And in your youth thus slain shall you be.
But if you, as you should, love me chastely,
He will love you too, for your chasteness,
And show to you all his joy and brightness.'

Valerian, disciplined to God's fold,
Answered again: 'So I may trust thee,
Let me see the angel, and him behold,
And if then it is an angel indeed,
Then will I do as you have asked me.
And if you love another, by my oath,
Right with this sword I will slay you both.'

Cecilia answered swiftly, in this wise:
'If it's your wish, the angel shall you see,
If you'll believe in Christ, and be baptised.
Go forth on the Appian Way,' quoth she,
'And from this town walk but miles three,
And to the poor folk that do there dwell
Speak to them the words that I shall tell.

Tell them I, Cecilia, you to them sent,
For them to show you good Urban the old,
On secret business, and with good intent.
And when you Saint Urban do behold,
Tell him the words that I to you have told.
And when he has purged away your sin,
Then you will see the angel: go, begin.'

Valerian is to the place swiftly gone,
And as he was told, by her discerning,
He finds this holy old Urban anon,
There, among the saint's burials lurking.
And he anon, without tarrying,
Gives his message, and when he has it told,
Urban, for joy, his hands does uphold.

The tears from his eyes he then let fall.
'Almighty Lord, O Jesus Christ,' quoth he,
'Sower of chaste intent, shepherd of us all,
The fruit of this seed of chastity
You have sown in Cecilia, take to thee!
Lo, like a busy bee, that knows no guile,
Your thrall Cecilia serves you all the while!

For the spouse whom she wed but now
Full like a fierce lion, she sends him here
As meek as ever was any lamb, to Thou.'
And at his words anon there did appear
An old man, clad in white clothes clear,
With a gold-lettered book in his hand,
And before Valerian he took his stand.

Valerian, as if dead, fell down from dread,
On seeing him: the old man raised him though,
And then from his book right thus he read:
'One Lord, One Faith, one God alone;
One Christendom, and father of all also,
Above all, and over all, everywhere.'
These words all in gold written were.

When he had read this, then, said the old man:
'Believe you this thing or no? – Say yea or nay!'
'I believe all this thing,' quoth Valerian,
'For a truer thing than this, I dare well say,
Under the heavens, none believe or may.'
Then the old man vanished – he knew not where –
And Pope Urban baptised him then and there.

Valerian went home and found Cecilia
Who in his room with an angel did stand.
This angel had of roses and of lilies
Two coronals which he bore in hand.
And first to Cecilia, as I understand,
He gave the one, and after I may state
The other gave to Valerian, her mate.

'With body chaste, and with unblemished thought,
Cherish these crowns forever, 'quoth he.
'From Paradise to you I have them brought;
Nevermore shall they fade, as you shall see,
Nor lose their sweet savour, trust in me,
Nor will any see them with their eyes
Unless chaste and shameful acts they despise.

And you, Valerian, since you so soon
Assented to good counsel also,
Say what you wish, and you shall have it too.'
'I have a brother,' quoth Valerian 'know,
That in this world I love no man so.
I pray you that my brother may have grace
To know the truth, as I do in this place.'

The angel said: 'God favours such request,
And thus with the palm of martyrdom,
Both of you shall reach his blissful rest.'
And Tiburce his brother he bade come,
And when he the fragrance in the room
Perceived, that the roses and lilies cast,
He felt the heart within his breast beat fast,

And said: 'I wonder, at this time of year,
Whence that sweet fragrance issues so
Of roses and lilies that I smell here!
Though I had them in my hands I know
The fragrance in me might no deeper go.
The sweet smell that in myself I find
Has changed me all in another kind.'

Valerian said: 'Two coronals have we,
Snow white and rose red, shining clear,
Which no eyesight has the power to see;
And as you smell them, through prayer, here,
So shall you see them, my brother dear,
If you'll believe, without delay, this proof
Aright, and acknowledge the very truth.'

Tiburce answered: 'Say you this to me,
In reality, or do I dream all this?
'In dreams, 'quoth Valerian,' have we
Been until now, brother mine, now is
Our dwelling place in truth and in bliss.'
'How know you this?' quoth Tiburce, 'in what wise?'
Quoth Valerian: 'Of that I shall advise.

The angel of God has the truth so taught,
Which you shall see, if you will forsake
The idols and be chaste, or else see naught.'
– And of the miracle of these crowns you may
Hear in Saint Ambrose' *Preface*, I say;
Solemnly that noble Doctor dear
Commends it, and speaks in this manner here:

'The palm of martyrdom for to receive,
Saint Cecilia, filled full of God's grace,
Her chamber and the world itself did leave.
Witness Tiburce and Valerian's faith,
To whom God in his bounty, gave apace,
Twin coronals of flowers sweet smelling,
And had to them his angel the crowns bring.

The maid had brought these men to bliss above;
The world has learnt the worth, for certain,
Of devotion to chastity in love.'
This Cecilia showed, openly and plain
And that all idols are but things in vain,
For they are dumb, and deaf, to deceive,
And she charged men idols for to leave.'

'Whoever knows not this, a beast he is'
Quoth Tiburce, 'and let me tell no lie.'
And Cecilia kissed him hearing this,
And was full glad he could the truth espy.
'This day are we as kinfolk now allied,'
Said then the blissful fair maiden dear,
And after that she spoke as you shall hear:

'Lo, just as the love of Christ,' quoth she,
'Made me your brother's wife, in that same wise
Anon for my kinsman here take I thee,
Since idolatry you do despise.
Go with your brother now and be baptised,
And make yourself chaste, that you may behold
The angel's face of which your brother told.'

Tiburce answered and said: 'Brother dear,
First tell me where to go, and to what man.'
'To whom?' quoth he, 'Come, with right good cheer;
And I will lead you there, to Pope Urban'
'To Urban, brother mine, Valerian?'
Quoth Tiburce: 'Will you thither lead?
That would be a wondrous thing indeed!

'You cannot mean Urban, he who has so
Often been condemned, he should be dead,
Who lives in hiding, wandering to and fro,
And from hiding dare not put out his head?
For men would burn him in a fire so red
If he were found, or men might him spy,
And we too, in his company, would die!

And while we seek for that divinity
That is concealed in heaven secretly,
We shall be burnt in this world, I see.'
To which Cecilia said courageously:
'Men would fear rightly, indeed, and wisely,
To lose this life, my own dear brother,
If this were the only life, and no other.

But there's a better life in another place,
That never shall be lost, fear you naught,
Which God's Son told us of, in His grace.
The Father's Son has all things wrought,
And all that's wrought with rational thought
The Holy Ghost, from the Father proceeding,
Has endowed with souls: this we believe in.

By word and by miracle, He, God's Son,
When He was in the world, declared here
That there was another life yet to be won.'
To which answered Tiburce: 'Sister dear,
Did you not speak just now, in this manner:
There is but one God, Lord, in truthfulness?
How then to three may you bear witness?'

'This I'll explain, 'quoth she, 'ere I go.
Just as men have intelligences three –
Memory, invention, reason also –
So in one being, one divinity,
Three persons there may easily be.'
Then she began busily to preach
Of Christ's coming, and His Pains did teach,

And many details too of His Passion –
How God's Son this world in bonds did hold
To win Mankind complete remission,
That was bound in sin and cares cold –
All these things, to Tiburce she told.
And after this, Tiburce, with good intent,
With Valerian, he to Pope Urban went,

Urban thanked God; and with glad heart and light
Baptised him, and made him in that place
Perfect in his knowledge, God's own knight.
And after this, Tiburce knew such grace
That every day he saw, in time and space,
The angel of God; and every kind of boon
He asked of God was granted him full soon.

It would be hard in sequence to relate
How many wonders Jesus for them wrought.
But at the last, brief and plain to state,
The sergeant of the town of Rome them sought,
And him to Almachius, the Prefect, brought,
Who questioned them and knew all their intent,
And to the statue of Jupiter them sent,

And said: 'Whoever will not sacrifice,
Cut off his head! This is my sentence here.'
Anon these martyrs of whom I advise,
One Maximus, who was an officer
And an adjutant in the Prefecture,
Took them, and when he forth the saints led,
He himself wept for pity, it is said.

When Maximus had heard the saints' lore,
Of the executioners he sought leave,
To lead them to his house, and before
Night fell, their preaching he did believe,
And the executioners also they freed,
And Maximus, and his household each one,
From the false faith, to trust in God alone.

Cecilia, when it was almost night,
With priests, to baptise them, did appear;
And afterwards, when it was almost light,
Cecilia said to them with steadfast cheer:
'Now, Christ's own knights, beloved and dear,
Cast away all the works of darkness,
And clad yourselves in armour of brightness.

You did, in truth, in mighty battle prevail.
Your course is run; your faith you have preserved.
Go to the crown of life that shall not fail!
The righteous Judge whom you have truly served
Shall grant it you, for you have so deserved.'
And when all this was said, as I advise,
Men led them forth, to make their sacrifice.

But when they were to the temple brought,
To tell you, all briefly, the conclusion,
Of sacrifice and incense they'd have naught,
But, praying, the bare ground they knelt upon,
With humble hearts and with sad devotion,
And both their heads were severed in that place,
Their souls departing to the King of Grace.

Then Maximus, who saw it, testified
With piteous tears of what he'd seen aright,
That their souls did into heaven glide
With angels full of chastity and light;
And with his words converted men outright,
For which Almachius with whips did beat
Him, leaded thongs, till he with death did meet.

Cecilia took and buried him anon,
Near Tiburce and Valerian, gently,
Within her burial-place beneath a stone.
And after this Almachius swiftly
Bade his officers fetch openly
Cecilia, so that in his presence
She might sacrifice to Jove, with incense.

But they, converted by her wise lore,
Wept full sore, and gave full credence
To her words, and cried out more and more,
'Christ, God's Son, between them no difference
Is God indeed – this is the thought and sense
Of the good servant, she who Him does serve!
This with one voice we swear, and will not swerve.'

Almachius, who heard of all this doing,
Bade them bring Cecilia, that he might see;
And first of all, lo, this was his questioning:
'What manner of woman are you?' quoth he.
'I am a gentlewoman born,' quoth she.
'I ask,' quoth he, 'though it may bring you grief,
You of your religion, and your belief.'

'You have begun to question foolishly,'
Quoth she, 'who would two points include
In one demand; you have asked stupidly.'
Almachius his questioning pursued:
'Whence comes this reply, which is so rude?'
'Whence?' quoth she, her answer unrestrained,
'From conscience and from a faith unfeigned.'

Almachius said: 'Do you then take no heed
Of my power?' And she answered like this:
'Your might,' quoth she, 'is naught for me to dread,
For every mortal man's power is
But like a bladder full of wind, but kiss
It with a needle's point, as you well know,
And all its greatness will be laid full low.'

'Full wrongfully have you begun,' quoth he,
'And still in wrong show your perseverance!
Do you not know our mighty princes free
Have thus commanded, and made ordinance,
That every Christian shall do penance,
Unless his Christianity he gainsay,
But go scot free yet, if he will renege?'

'Your princes err, as your great nobles do,'
Quoth Cecilia, 'for with foolish sentence
You call us guilty, yet it is not true;
For you, who know well our innocence,
Inasmuch as we show our reverence
For Christ, and bear a Christian name,
You charge us with a crime, us seek to blame.

But we who understand that name as though
It were all virtue, may not it gainsay.'
Almachius answered her: 'Choose so:
Make the sacrifice, or renege, I say,
You may yet escape death in that way.'
At which the holy blissful fair maid
Began to laugh, and to the judge she said:

'O Judge, confused you are, in your folly!
Do you think I would deny my innocence,
And render myself thus wicked?' quoth she.
'Lo, he dissimulates before an audience!
He restrains himself yet rages lost to sense,
Inwardly.' Almachius answered: 'Wretch,
Do you not know how far my powers stretch?

Did not to me our mighty princes give,
Yea, both the power and authority
To sentence folk to die or to live?
Why speak so proudly then to me?'
'I only spoke steadfastly,' quoth she,
'Not proudly; for I say, those on our side,
All hate in truth the deadly vice of pride.

And if you dread not the truth to hear,
Then will I show all openly, by right,
That you have made a false error here.
You say the princes granted you your might
Both to slay men or grant them life outright.
You may only men of life bereave,
You have no other powers, nor no leave.

Thus you may say the princes have so made
You minister of death; but if you speak also
Of life, you lie, such power's nowhere displayed.'
'Quench your boldness,' said Almachius, 'Go,
Sacrifice to our gods, I order so.
I care not what insults to me you offer,
For I can suffer them, as a philosopher:

But this foul insult I may not endure
That you level at our gods,' quoth he.
Cecilia answered: 'Foolish creature,
Not a single word have you said to me,
That did not betray your rank folly,
And that you are in every way there is
An ignorant official, a vain justice.

There is every sign in your outer eye
Of blindness; for a dumb thing, that all
Can see is stone – and you as well as I –
That same stone a deity you would call.
I counsel you, there let your own hand fall,
And feel it well, mere stone there will you find,
Since you cannot see it's so, with eyes all blind.

Shameful for you that the people shall
So scorn you, and laugh at your folly, ay,
For men know here, as truly as do all,
That mighty God is in the heavens high,
And these statues, if you had the eyes,
To you, as to themselves, bring no profit,
Not worth a groat, they show no benefit.'

These words, and others like them, said she;
And he was angered, and bade her be lead
Home to her house, 'and in her house,' quoth he,
'Burn her outright in a bath of flames red.'
And it was done, precisely as he said,
For in a bath they shut her, and the glow
Of a great fire burned night and day below.

All a long night, and for a day also,
Despite the fire, and the bath's great heat,
She sat all cold, and felt no touch of woe,
Nor one drop of sweat, from head to feet.
Yet in that bath her death she must meet,
For he Almachius, with base intent,
His man, to slay her in the bath, he sent.

Three strokes in the neck he smote her so,
Her executioner; yet by no chance
Could he smite her neck in two, all know.
And as at that time there was an ordinance
That no man should a further stroke advance
Whether to smite a fourth time, soft or sore,
The executioner dared do no more,

But half dead, with her neck carven there,
Left her lying, and on his way he went.
The Christian folk, who about her were,
With sheets the flow of blood did quench.
Three days she lived on, in this torment,
And never ceased them the faith to teach
That she had fostered; and so did preach,

And entrusted them with all her things,
And to the Pope Urban bequeathed them so,
And said: 'I ask this of Heaven's King,
Respite for three days, ere I go,
To commend them to you, these souls, lo,
And that I might begin a holy work
Making my house a perpetual church.'

Saint Urban, and his deacons, secretly,
Took up her body, buried it by night
Among the other saints, all reverently.
Her house, the Church of Saint Cecilia bright,
Saint Urban consecrated, as was his right;
In which, unto this day, in noble wise,
Men still do service to the saint and Christ.

Here is ended the Second Nun's Tale

The Manciple's Prologue

Here follows the Prologue of the Manciple's Tale

o you all know where stands a little town
Which everybody calls Bob-Up-and-Down,
Under the Blean, down Canterbury way?
There our Host began to jest and play,
And said: 'Sires, we're stuck! Dun's in the mire!
Is there no man, for prayer or for hire,
Will wake our friend sleeping there behind?
A thief as now might easily rob him blind.
Look at him napping! See how, God's bones,
He'll tumble from his horse onto the stones!
Is that the London Cook, cursed mischance?
Make him come forth, and do his penance,
For he shall tell a tale too, by my faith,
Although it's not worth a barrow of hay.
Awake, thou Cook!' quoth he, 'God give you sorrow!
What ails you to sleep this fine morrow?
Did fleas bite you all night? Or are you drunk?
Or had you a harlot all night in your bunk,
So you've not the strength to lift your head?'
  The Cook, who was full pale and nothing red,
Said to our Host: 'So God my soul may bless,
There fell upon me such a heaviness –
I know not why – I'd rather have my sleep
Than the best barrel of wine in Westcheap.'
  'Well,' quoth the Manciple, 'it it may ease
Your pain, Sir Cook, and no one else displease

That rides among us in this company,
And if our Host agrees, of his courtesy,
I will for now excuse you of your tale.
For in good faith your visage is full pale.
Your eyes are dull as well now, methinks,
And I find your breath full sour it stinks;
It's obvious that you are indisposed.
By me, for certain, you'd not be proposed!
See how he yawns now, this drunken knight,
As though he would swallow us all aright.
Close your mouth man, by your father's kin!
The devil from Hell has set his foot therein!
Your cursed breath will soon infect us all.
Fie, stinking swine, to foulness you'll fall!
Ah, take heed, sires, of this gallant man!
Now, sweet sire, will you joust at the fan?
It looks as if you're in perfect shape!
I'd say you're as drunken as an ape,
That's when men suck wine out with a straw.'
  At this speech the Cook grew wrath and raw,
At the Manciple he shook his head full fast
For lack of speech, and off the horse him cast,
Where he lay a-sprawling, till someone took
Him up: this was a fair horseman of a cook!
Alas, he couldn't hold on by his ladle!
And, ere he was once more in the saddle,
There was much shoving, both to and fro,
To get him up, a deal of care and woe,
So helpless was this sorry pallid ghost.
And to the Manciple then spoke our Host:
  'Because drink has the domination
Of this poor man, by my salvation,
I think but poorly he'd tell his tale.
Whether it's wine or old or fresh-brewed ale
That he's drunk, he's speaking through his nose,
And wheezing hard, and like to have a cold.
He's more than enough to do right now

To keep him and his horse from the slough;
And if he falls from his horse a time or two,
Then we shall all have enough to do
In lifting of his heavy drunken carcase.
Tell on your tale; he's nothing to the purpose.
– Yet, Manciple, it's hardly my advice
To openly reprove him for his vice.
Another day, he will, peradventure,
Reclaim you, and call you to the lure.
I mean, he'll chatter about little things,
Such as small errors in your reckonings,
All not quite honest, if it came to proof.'
'What,' quoth the Manciple, 'is that the truth!
So might he easily catch me in a snare.
Well now, I'd rather pay him for the mare
He rides on, than have him with me strive.
I'll not anger him so, as I would thrive!
Whatever I spoke, I said but jesting word.
And know you now I have here in a gourd
A draught of wine, yea, of a ripened grape,
And right anon you'll see a merry jape.
The Cook must drink thereof, indeed, I say;
On pain of death, he shall not say me nay.'
And certainly, to tell this as it was,
The Cook drank from it fast enough – alas!
What need, since he'd been drunk all the morn?
And when he had tooted on this merry horn,
To the Manciple he gave the gourd again;
And with that drink the Cook was free of pain,
And thanked him, best as he could, and bowed.
Then our Host began to laugh wondrous loud,
And said: 'I see now, that it's necessary,
When we go abroad, good drink to carry,
For it will turn all rancour and distress
To peace and love, and many a wrong redress.
O Bacchus, now thus blessed be your name,
That can so make of earnestness a game!

Worship and thanks be to your deity!
Of all that now you'll get no more of me;
Tell on your tale, sir Manciple, I pray.'
'Well, sire,' quoth he, 'now hark to what I say.'

The Manciple's Tale

Here begins the Manciple's Tale of the Crow

hen Phoebus had on earth his habitation,
As the ancient books are pleased to mention,
He was the most gallant of bachelors
In all this world, and the best of archers.
He slew Python, the serpent, as he lay
Sleeping on the ground one sunny day.
And many another noble worthy deed
He wrought with his great bow, as men may read.
And every instrument of minstrelsy,
He could play, and sing, that a melody
It was merely to hear his clear voice sound.
In truth, the King of Thebes, Amphion,
Who with his singing walled a city,
Could never sing half so well as he.
And also he was the handsomest man
That is, or was, since all the world began.
What need his noble features to describe?
– For in this world was none so fair alive,
He was filled full, as well, with nobleness,
With honour, and perfect courteousness.
This Phoebus, the flower of chivalry
And noted as well for magnanimity,
To sport himself – and mark his victory
Over Python, so runs the old story –
Was wont to carry in his hand a bow.
Now Phoebus in his house he had a crow,
That in a cage he nurtured many a day,

And taught to speak, as men will teach a jay.
White was this crow as is a snow-white swan,
And counterfeited the speech of every man
Whenever he set out to tell a tale.
And too, in all this world, no nightingale
Could in a hundred thousandth part excel
In singing so wondrous sweet and well.
  Now in his house this Phoebus had a wife,
Whom he loved more than his very life,
And night and day he showed his diligence
In pleasing her, and doing her reverence;
Except for the fact that, truth to say,
He was jealous, and in a gilded cage
Would have kept her, and live undeceived.
And so is every man to some degree;
But all in vain, for it avails us naught.
A good wife who's chaste in deed and thought,
Should not be spied upon, that's for certain;
And truly it is labour all in vain
To keep watch on a bad one, can't succeed.
This I hold as foolishness indeed,
To waste labour keeping watch on wives.
– Thus the ancients wrote throughout their lives.
  Now to my purpose, as I first began:
This noble Phoebus does the best he can
To please her, thinking to dance attendance,
And that with his courtesy and governance,
No man would eclipse him from her grace.
But, God knows, no man can embrace
With restraints anything that nature
Has naturally implanted in a creature.
  Take a bird: imprison him in a cage,
And all your care and your intent engage
On feeding him tenderly with meat and drink,
And every dainty of which you can think,
And keep him there as tidily as you may,
Although his gilded cage be never so gay,

Yet would the bird twenty thousand fold
Prefer his forest, however harsh and cold,
A diet of worms, and other nastiness.
Forever this bird will be about the business
Of escaping from his cage, if he may;
His liberty the bird desires, I say.
  Or take a cat, and nurture it well on milk
And tender flesh, and make his bed of silk,
Let him but see a mouse by the wall –
Anon he abandons milk and flesh and all,
And every dainty thing that's in the house,
Such is his appetite to eat a mouse!
Lo, here has desire its domination,
And appetite banishes discretion.
  She-wolves too are of the baser kind:
The coarsest wolf that she may find,
Or least in reputation, will she take,
When the time comes to find a mate.
  All these examples are aimed at men
Who prove untrue, in no way at women.
For men have ever a lecherous appetite
On lower things to perform their delight
Than on their wives, be they ever so fair,
Or be they ever so true, and debonair.
Flesh is so fond of novelty – sad mischance! –
Newfangledness finds nothing in the glance
That's in accord with virtue, for any while.
  This Phoebus, who was innocent of guile,
Was deceived, despite that he was comely,
For under him another man had she,
He a man of little reputation,
Not worth Phoebus in comparison.
More is the harm, it happens often so,
From which there comes much harm and woe.
  So it befell, when Phoebus was absent,
His wife anon for her cocksman sent.
Her *cocksman*? Indeed, a knavish speech!

Forgive me the term, I do beseech
  Plato, the wise, says this, as you may read:
The word should ever accord with the deed.
If a man would speak rightly of a thing,
The word must be cousin to the doing.
I'm a blunt man, and right thus say I:
There is no difference, to my eye,
Between a wife who is of high degree,
If with her body she dishonest be,
And a poor wench, lower than all this –
If it so be they both do go amiss –
Except that the gentlewoman above,
Will be called his lady, as in love,
But the other who's a poor woman,
Shall be called his wench or his *lemman*.
Yet God knows, my own dear brother,
Men lay the one as low as lies the other.
  Just as between a usurping tyrant
And an outlaw or a thief arrant,
The same appertains; there's no difference.
Alexander the Great heard just this sentence:
That because a tyrant has great might,
By force of armies to slay outright,
And burn house and home, and scorch the plain,
Lo he's a mighty general, men explain;
But the outlaw with a tiny company,
Who may not do as great harm as he,
Nor bring a country to such great mischief,
Men label him an outlaw or a thief.
But as I am unlearned, not textual,
Never a word of texts shall I tell;
I'll return to the tale that I began.
  When Phoebus' wife had sent for her man,
Anon they wrought their lust to assuage.
The white crow, who hung there in his cage
Beheld the work, but spoke never a word.
But when home was come Phoebus his lord,

The crow sang out: 'Cuckoo! Cuckoo! Cuckoo!'
  What, bird?' quoth Phoebus, 'What song sing you?
Were you not wont so merrily to sing
That to my heart it was all rejoicing
To hear your voice? Alas, what song is this?'
'By God,' quoth he, I sing naught amiss!
Phoebus, 'quoth he, 'for all your worthiness,
For all your beauty and your nobleness,
For all your song and all your minstrelsy,
For all your watching, your eye's deceived
By a man of little reputation,
One not worth you, in comparison,
Not even worth a gnat, by my life!
For on your bed I saw him have your wife.'
  What more do you wish? The crow anon told,
With serious proof and with words bold,
How his wife had indulged in lechery,
Bringing him to great shame and misery,
Said he'd often seen it with his own eyes.
  Then Phoebus turned away, his thoughts awry,
And felt his sorrowful heart might break in two;
His bow he bent, and set therein an arrow,
And in his anger then his wife did slay –
That was the outcome: there's no more to say.
For sorrow he broke his tools of minstrelsy,
His harp and lute, gittern and psaltery,
And then he broke his arrows and his bow.
And after that thus spoke he to the crow:
  'Traitor,' quoth he, 'with tongue of scorpion,
You have brought me to my confusion!
Alas that I was born! Would I were dead!
O dear wife, O gem of joy now sped,
Who were to me so constant and so true,
Now you lie dead with face pale of hue,
All guiltless – that I dare swear, of this!
O reckless hand, to strike so far amiss!
O troubled mind! O anger heedless,

Thoughtlessly to smite the guiltless!
O mistrust, full of false suspicion!
Where was your reason and discretion?
O, every man, now, beware of rashness!
Believe nothing without strong witness.
Smite not too soon, ere you know why,
And take thought, with a sober eye,
Ere you indulge in execution,
In anger, born of mere suspicion.
Alas, a thousand folk has reckless ire
Destroyed, and hurled them in the mire!
Alas, of sorrow I'll perish utterly!'
  And to the crow: 'O, false thief!' said he,
'I will repay you now for your false tale.
Once you sang like to the nightingale;
Now shall you, false thief, your song forgo,
And all your white feathers, shall lose also,
Never through all your life shall you speak.
Thus shall we on a traitor vengeance wreak!
You and your offspring ever shall be black,
With no sweet sound shall you answer back,
But ever croak, foretelling storm and rain,
As sign that through you my wife was slain.'
And to the crow he went, and that anon,
And pulled out his white feathers every one,
And made him black, and took away his song,
And his speech too, and out of doors he's gone
To the devil: that *he* might take him back.
And for this reason so are all crows black.
  Lordings, of this example I you pray,
Beware, and be careful what you say:
And never tell a man, thus, on your life,
That another man has been with his wife.
He will hate you mortally, for certain.
King Solomon, as the clerks explain,
Teaches a man to guard his tongue well –
Though as I said, I am not textual –

Nevertheless, thus taught to me, my dame:
'My son, think of the crow, in God's name!
My son, keep your counsel and keep your friend.
A wicked tongue is one the fiend doth send;
My son, against the fiend a man may bless!
My son, God, of his eternal goodness,
Walled the tongue too with lips and teeth,
For a man should be careful what he speaks.
My son, full often by a careless speech
Has many a man been ruined, clerks do teach,
But by saying little, and advisedly,
No man is ruined, speaking generally.
My son, your tongue you should restrain
At all times, except when you take pain
To speak of God in honour and prayer.
The first virtue, son, be you aware,
Is to restrain, and guard well your tongue;
So children learn when they are young.
My son, from much speaking, ill-advised,
Where less speech would have sufficed,
Comes much harm: so I was told and taught.
Too much speaking of sin lacks naught.
Know you not how a reckless tongue serves?
As a sword that slashes about and swerves,
Slicing an arm or two, my son, just so
A tongue severs friendship at a blow.
A chatterer is to God abominable.
Read Solomon, the wise and honourable;
Read David in his *Psalms*; read Seneca.
My son, speak not at all but be a nodder.
Feign to be deaf, if you but chance to hear
A gossip speaking of some dangerous matter.
The Flemings say – and note it if you please –
That lack of gossip is a source of peace.
My son, if you no wicked speech have made,
You need never fear you'll be betrayed;
And he that speaks ill, I should explain,

He may never recall his words again.
A thing that's said is said, and forth it goes,
Though regretted, like as not, I'd suppose.
He is a thrall to one to whom he's said
Words he now regrets: speak not, instead.
My son: be wary, be not the author new
Of tidings, whether they are false or true.
Wherever you are, among the high or low,
Guard your tongue, and think about the crow.

Here is ended the Manciple's Tale of the Crow

THE PARSON'S PROLOGUE

HERE FOLLOWS THE PROLOGUE TO THE PARSON'S TALE

ith that the Manciple his tale ended,
The sun from the meridian descended
So low that he was no more, to my sight,
Than nine and twenty degrees in height.
Four of the clock it was, or so I guess,
For eleven feet or so, no more no less,
My shadow at that moment lay there,
Marking a foot as if my length were
Of six equal feet, in due proportion;
And the sign of Saturn's exaltation –
I mean Libra – beginning to ascend,
As we were entering a hamlet's end.
  Upon which our Host, as he was pleased
To govern, as now, our jolly company,
Spoke in this wise: 'Lordings every one,
Now of tales we lack no more than one.
Fulfilled is my pronouncement and decree;
We've had a tale from each in their degree.
Almost fulfilled is all my ordinance.
I pray God brings him what of best may chance,
Who tells this last tale entertainingly!
  'Sir priest,' quoth he, '– a vicar now art thee,
Or a parson? The truth now by your faith! –
Whatever you are, spoil you not our play,
For every man save you has told his tale.
Unbuckle now, and show what's in your bale,

For truly, your face is of such cheer
You con mighty matter it would appear.
Tell us a fable anon, by cock's bones!'
  The Parson then answered him at once:
'You'll get no fable that's told by me.
For Paul, in writing there to Timothy,
Reproves those who swerve from truthfulness,
Relating fables and such sinfulness.
Why should I sow chaff from my fist,
When I can sow wheat, as I would wish?
So I will say, that if you wish to hear
Of morality and virtuous things here,
And grant me of my speech an audience,
I will gladly do Christ full reverence,
Giving you lawful pleasure, as I can.
But in truth I am a southern man;
I cannot give you "rum, ram, ruf" by letter,
And, God knows, I hold rhyme little better.
Rhyme and alliteration I'll dispose
With, and tell you a merry tale in prose,
To knit up all this game and make an end.
And Jesus, of his grace, may wit me send
To show you the manner, in this passage
Of that perfect glorious pilgrimage
That's called Jerusalem the celestial.
And if you all agree, anon I shall
Begin my tale, on which now I pray
Give your opinion; I can no better say.
  Yet nonetheless, this meditation
I submit it always for correction
By clerics, for I am not textual.
I take but the moral, trust me well.
Therefore I make this protestation
That what I say may stand correction.'
  These words of his we all assented to;
For, it seemed to us, fit thing to do
To end with some virtuous sentence,

And to grant him space and audience.
And bade our Host he should then say
That to tell his tale we did him pray.
  Our Host spoke the words for us all:
'Sir priest,' quoth he, 'good luck you befall!
Say what you will, and we will gladly hear.'
And with that he added in manner here:
'Tell us,' quoth he,' all your meditation,
But haste you, for the sun's in declination.
Be fruitful now in a little space,
And to tell it well God send you grace.'

The Parson's Tale

Translator's note: The following extract is provided to illustrate the style of this lengthy prose sermon on the right preparation for Confession, and the nature of the Seven Deadly Sins. The sermon discusses Penitence and Contrition, and then the seven sins. Freely willed Confession leads to Satisfaction in alms-giving, penance, fasting and bodily pain. Its fruit is heavenly bliss.

HERE BEGINS THE PARSON'S TALE

State super vias et videte et interrogate de viis antiquis que sit via bona et ambulate in ea et invenietis refrigerium animabus vestris…

(Jeremiah 6:16)

Our sweet lord God of Heaven, in order that no man shall perish, and that we all come to knowledge of Him and the blissful life everlasting, admonishes us through the prophet Jeremiah in this wise: 'Stand in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein and you shall find rest for your souls…' many are the spiritual ways that lead folk to our lord Jesus Christ and to the reign of glory; of which ways, there is a full noble and fitting way, which may not fail man or woman who through sin has wandered from the true way of Jerusalem celestial, and this way is called penitence, of which man should gladly hearken and enquire with all his heart, to whit what is penitence, and whence it is called penitence, and of how many kinds are the actions and workings of penitence, and how many sorts of penitence there are, and what things appertain and are fitting to penitence and what things disturb penitence.

Saint Ambrose says that penitence is the wailing of man over the guilt he has done, and the resolution that he will no longer do anything that he may lament. And some Doctor said: 'Penitence is the lamentation of a man that sorrows for his sin and pines for his misdeeds.' Penitence, in given circumstances, is the true repentance of a man who is in sorrow and pain for his guilt; and in order that he shall be truly penitent, he must first bewail the sins he has committed, and resolve steadfastly in his heart to confess verbally and give satisfaction, and never do anything more that he may bewail or lament, and to continue in good works, or else his repentance is of no avail. For as Saint Isidore says: 'he is a trifler and an idle talker and no true penitent, who again does things which he must repent.' Weeping without ceasing from sin is of no avail. Yet, nonetheless, men may hope that every time man falls, be it ever so often, he may arise through

penitence, if he has grace, but certainly there is great doubt; for, as says Saint Gregory, he arises only with difficulty from his sin who is charged with the charge of evil usage. And therefore repentant folk, who cease from sin, and renounce sin before sin renounces them, Holy Church holds them more secure of their salvation. And he that sins and truly repents him at the last, Holy Church yet hopes for his salvation, through the great mercy of our lord Jesus Christ, for his repentance; yet take the safer way…….

CHAUCER'S RETRACTION

HERE TAKETH THE MAKER LEAVE OF HIS BOOK

ow I pray all those that hearken to this little treatise or read, that if there be anything in it that pleases them, they thank Our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom proceeds all wit and all goodness. And if there be anything that displeases them, I pray them also to blame it upon my lack of skill, who would full gladly have spoken better if I had that skill. For our Book says: 'all that is written is written for our doctrine,' and that is my intent. Wherefore I beseech you meekly, for the mercy of God, that you pay for me, that Christ may have mercy upon me and forgive me my sins; and namely for my translations and writing on worldly vanities, which I revoke in my retraction: as are the Book of Troilus, the Book also of Fame, The Legend of Good Women, the Book of the Duchess; the Book of Saint Valentine's Day of the Parliament of Fowls, The Tales of Canterbury, those that conduce to sin, the Book of the Lion; and many another book, if they were in my remembrance, and many a song and many a lecherous lay; that Christ in his great mercy forgive me the sin.

But the translation of Boethius' *De Consolatione*, and other books of legends of Saints, and homilies and morality and devotion, for them I thank Our Lord Jesus Christ and His Blissful Mother, and all the Saints of Heaven; beseeching them that they from henceforth unto my life's end send me grace to bewail my sins, and to study the salvation of my soul, and grant me the grace of true penitence, confession and satisfaction, to perform in this present life, through the benign grace of Him that is King of kings and Priest over all priests, who bought us with the precious blood of His heart, so that I may be one of those at the day of doom that shall be saved. *Qui cum patre* etc.

Here is ended the book of the
Tales of Canterbury compiled by Geoffrey Chaucer,
on whose soul Jesus Christ have mercy. Amen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

eoffrey Chaucer was born c1343 in London to a prosperous family of wine-merchants. Through his father's connections, he began his official duties as page to the Countess of Ulster, the wife of Lionel, second son to the king, Edward III. Chaucer subsequently served as courtier, diplomat and civil servant while also establishing his poetic reputation. He appears to have travelled widely in Europe during his varied court career. He married Philippa de Roet, lady-in-waiting to the queen, and sister to Katherine Swynford, John of Gaunt's third wife, and flourished under John of Gaunt's patronage. His most prolific period of writing was during his time as comptroller of customs for the port of London, between 1374 and 1386, both *Troilus and Criseyde*, his finely constructed poem based on classical and Renaissance sources, and the early *Canterbury Tales*, his celebration of the English social landscape, dating from that time. Chaucer is thought to have died in October 1400, not long after the overthrow of his royal patron Richard II and the accession of Henry IV, and he was buried in Westminster Abbey, that being his right as a tenant of the Abbey Close, in what has become known as Poet's Corner. His son Thomas had a significant career at the court of successive kings, and as Speaker of the House of Commons..

ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

nthony Kline lives in England. He graduated in Mathematics from the University of Manchester, and was Chief Information Officer (Systems Director) of a large UK Company, before dedicating himself to his literary work and interests. He was born in 1947. His work consists of translations of poetry; critical works, biographical history with poetry as a central theme; and his own original poetry. He has translated into English from Latin, Ancient Greek, Classical Chinese and the European languages. He also maintains a deep interest in developments in Mathematics and the Sciences.

He continues to write predominantly for the Internet, making all works available in download format, with an added focus on the rapidly developing area of electronic books. His most extensive works are complete translations of Ovid's Metamorphoses and Dante's Divine Comedy.